

(The Challenge of Missions) 3. THE FRUITS OF MISSIONS

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Transcript

"The tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22: 2). While of course this lofty symbolism has a literal meaning and some day will be actually fulfilled in the city of glory, yet it is not straining any principle of Scripture interpretation to apply it figuratively to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the great salvation which that Gospel brings. We propose therefore to consider in the light of this striking image what the Gospel has done for the healing of the nations and the feeding of the heart hunger of a perishing world. Perhaps the leaves of the tree of life may refer more particularly to the physical and the temporal blessings which the Gospel brings to mankind, while the fruits of the tree have a more general reference to the spiritual benefits of Christianity to our race. We shall, however, at this time make no forced distinction between the two parts of this double figure, but in a general way endeavor to trace twelve of the chief fruits of Christianity among the nations to whom it has been proclaimed and is being today proclaimed with new energy in the world of worldwide evangelization.

I. The first fruit of the tree of life is salvation. Man's lost condition is the root of all his misery and the merely physical and social conditions of our race can never be remedied until we begin at the beginning, by removing that root of bitterness and death and restore humanity to its true relation to God as a reconciled Father in the face of Jesus Christ. This is what no other religion offers or even attempts. There is nothing in paganism or Mohammedanism that even remotely approximates to the message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Other religions try to ameliorate some of the conditions of man's state, but none of them are able to change it as the Gospel does and lift them up to the favor and fellowship of the God from whom he has been separated by sin. Until humanity is thus brought back to God the world is a wandering star, cut off from its center and ever traveling farther and farther into the blackness of darkness forever. The Gospel makes men right with God, cancels the curse of sin, opens all the avenues of fellowship, confidence, prayer and love and brings the outcast to his Father's house and makes the criminal a child of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ. Oh, is it not worth our while to spend and be spent to give to the world such a Gospel of salvation? Compared with this how petty all our efforts at civilization, education and mere self-improvement. The first and the essential thing is to cure the dread disease of sin and restore the interrupted channel of life and communion with Him apart from whom there can be no life or happiness.

2. The second fruit of Christianity is righteousness. The Gospel not only provides for the forgiveness of sins on a sure and immovable basis, but it also provides for the transformation of human nature, for the removal of man's natural tendency to sin, for the purifying of his heart and life and for the implanting of all those divine forces which work for righteousness and holiness. It is idle to say that the righteous judge will not deal harshly even with the heathen if they have tried to do their best and lived up to the light they had. This is only begging the question, for the heathen do not live up to the light they have and cannot do their best, without some new spiritual force, stronger than good resolutions, lofty examples or high ethical teaching. The very essence of sin is that it paralyzes our moral power and leaves us without strength, and the very essence of Christianity is that when we were without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly and "what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath done by making us free from the law of sin and death." The Gospel is a divine secret of life and righteousness and wherever it is truly received it takes away man's natural love of sin and works in him to will and do of God's good will and pleasure. Christ says about it, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." The Apostle Paul says about it, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under law, but under grace." The Apostle John says about it, "He that abideth in him sinneth not." The Apostle Peter says about it, "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust." Therefore, we find that wherever this Gospel goes it conquers the selfishness, uncleanness, deceitfulness, cruelty and wickedness of human hearts and bears the fruit of love, joy, peace, long suffering, goodness, meekness, temperance, faith. Even the infidel historian Gibbon confesses that the early triumphs of the Gospel were largely due to the influence of the pure and lofty lives lived by the early Christians and the great naturalist Darwin has left on record his testimony of wonder and admiration at the transformation which the Gospel had wrought among the Indians of Terra del Fuego and the savages of the South Sea Islands.

3. Happiness is the next fruit of Christianity among the heathen. There is little happiness among the Christless nations. Sin has left its dreadful impress even upon the countenance. A traveler among these races cannot fail to notice the downlook of the great masses whose life seems like one long funeral march to the grave, and is instantly struck with the different appearance of the sweet girl students in the mission schools and the shining faces of the coarsest and most ordinary men as one sees them in one of the native congregations when singing the praises of the Redeemer. A Japanese woman asked a missionary teacher of a girls' school if they only took pretty girls as students, and the teacher replied, "No we do not make any condition about personal appearance at all." "Well," she said, "I would like to send my daughter to your school not to learn her Christianity, for you must not teach her that, but in order to get the look on her face that all your girls have."

4. The next fruit of Christianity is the home. There is no character for home in Chinese. We believe the character used for this also represents a pigpen. How can there be a happy home amid all the jealousies and strifes of polygamy with half a dozen wives and different families intriguing and contending? In South America and the West Indies the writer was constantly finding that the conditions of family life among the poor were such as to lead inevitably to immorality and corruption among the young from the very earliest years. There is but one family room as a rule where both sexes sleep together and all the privacies which are considered decent in Christian homes are utterly unknown and the youngest children know all about the family secrets and everything pertaining to birth and life and death, which no Christian mother would permit her child to know. Therefore, the establishing of one Christian home among the heathen is an object lesson of infinite value, and when family life can be rightly established, as it is in every Christian

mission, three-fourths of the difficulties of Christian living on the part of the native converts are removed. Never before did we so profoundly realize the preciousness of the Christian home as the fruit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Shall we give these little ones, these wronged and helpless women, these homeless orphaned children of the night the blessing of a Christian home?

5. Social elevation, education and material improvement. Archdeacon Phair, of Winnipeg, loves to tell how he can always know, when he enters an Indian cabin, whether the family is converted or not. If they are still pagans they all sit on the ground and their household goods are scattered in filth and confusion in every direction; but if they are Christians, they sit on stools and they have shelves around the walls to store their things and the higher up they are in the scale of Christianity the more traces are there of refinement and order. The same results appear in the matter of dress, and Dr. Paton tells how, in the South Sea Islands, a single shirt would be prized by a native Christian above all estimation, and he would regularly wear it to church on Sunday without another article of dress and feel himself many degrees higher in the scale of progress and dignity for that one item in his wardrobe. How Christianity has transformed the very appearance of the lands that once were like a desolate wilderness, but are now rejoicing and blossoming as the rose. As a rule people of unChristian races are utterly illiterate. The Gospel brings education, knowledge and intellectual improvement and progress. And the marvelous transformation of many of the rising communities of today in the Orient is chiefly due in its original causes to the mission schools.

6. National elevation is a result of Christianity. Where shall we look for a more striking example of this than in the story of Japan? The entrance of the Bible and the missionary, marks the first chapter of new Japan and the aspirations kindled by the Gospel had as much to do as the contact with western civilization in the great revival which has put Japan in the very front of Eastern nations. We have beheld the same evolution in China with the difference that the larger body is moving more slowly, but no intelligent observer can for a moment question that the marvelous progress of the past decade is chiefly due to the uplift of the Gospel among the thinking classes and the ideas which have come originally through the impulse of Christianity. The advent of Christianity in India marked the beginning of a new political condition; new ideas and influences began to work before which false methods of government were compelled to retire. Educational facilities were multiplied. The national mind was inspired with hopes. Industrial and commercial conditions were advanced on corresponding lines of improvement and a new India is emerging with the Gospel of Jesus Christ rapidly spreading among its people at a ratio thirty times as great as Buddhism and sixty times as fast as the increase of the population. Look at South Africa today and compare it with the Africa to which Moffat and Livingstone first went. Look at Uganda today and compare it with conditions a quarter of a century ago, even on lines of material progress, and every intelligent statesman will acknowledge that the transformation is largely due to the impulse derived from Christian missions.

7. One of the most precious fruits of missions is the improvement in the condition of woman. The Gospel is the charter of woman's liberty everywhere. And nothing is more marked as evidence of the difference between Christianity and paganism than woman's

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