

I Chose You to Bear Fruit

by John Piper

Jesus chose us for the work of ministry, and his honor is at stake in our success, so we must abide in Christ, let his words abide in us, and effectual prayer to bear fruit and glorify God.

Scripture: Matthew 11:27, John 4:35, John 10:3, John 12:23, John 13:34, John 15:5, John 15:8, John 15:16, Ephesians 4:12

Topics: "Fruitful Ministry", "Dying To Self"

Description

John Piper preaches on the significance of being chosen by Jesus to bear fruit, emphasizing that our fruitfulness must stem from the cross and our willingness to die to self. Jesus' choice of us signifies His commitment to help us succeed in our ministry, as His honor is at stake. The call to ministry is a result of Christ's choice of us, and we are encouraged to be bold in our work knowing that His honor is on the line. The ultimate aim of our ministry is to bear fruit by loving others and leading them to Christ, all for the glory of God.

Transcript

October 11, 1981

John 15:16

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15:16).

On the day after the night in which Jesus spoke these words to the eleven and to you, Glen, he laid himself down on the cross and bought you with his blood. You are now his fruit and his fruit-bearer. The only fruit that will ever endure to eternal life is fruit which grows out of the cross. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:23,24). We are Christ's fruit because he died for us. We are his fruit-bearers if we are willing to take up our cross and die with him. Never forget the setting of your text, Glen. It is not accident that when Jesus had commanded you to go and bear fruit, he went and died. Your call and your ministry must always stand in the shadow of the cross of Christ. The only fruit that will last is the fruit that grows on the cross.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you," Jesus says to the eleven apostles, and surely to everyone whom he calls to the ministry. Why did he say, "You did not choose me." It's not literally true. They had chosen to follow Jesus. He did not drag them into his service kicking and screaming. He does not hold them with bit and bridle. They are not looking for ways to escape from his ministry. In John 1:37 Andrew follows Jesus without even being asked and he goes to get Peter and brings him to Jesus (1:41). So the point is not even that Jesus made the first contact.

Turn it around. What if Jesus had said, "I did not choose you; you chose me?" What would most likely be the point of saying that? Wouldn't it mean, "I'm not bound to you. You wanted to come along. If the going gets rough, don't come whimpering to me. It's your choice, man. I didn't stake anything on your success." But Jesus said the opposite: "You did not choose me, but I chose you." And so the meaning probably is: "Your presence here is my doing and so I take full responsibility. I know you agreed to join me in this work, but deep in your heart you know it was I who laid claim on you and so my honor, not yours, is at stake in this work." If that is what Jesus means, then the reason he said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you," was to encourage us that he would help us. If his honor is at stake in our success because he chose us for the work, then we can be sure he will exert all his power to make us fruitful. Jesus will not lightly let his wisdom be scorned. Therefore, he will not look lightly on our cry for help, when we say, "Lord you chose me! You are not fickle. You are not shortsighted. You are not impulsive. Your choices have the weight of eternity in them. You will not let your chosen one be ruined. Help me, Lord." Such a plea--if it comes from the heart--he cannot ignore. His wisdom and constancy and reliability is at stake.

But in what sense did Jesus choose you differently from your choice of him? In at least two senses. He said, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). Glen, you nor I would have ever chosen Jesus had he not revealed to us the glory of the Father. Had Jesus not enabled us to see in him the image of the invisible God, we would never have come. Dead in trespasses and sins, blinded by the God of this world, we were hopelessly hell-bent until he called us by name and raised us from the dead. "The sheep hear his voice and he calls his sheep by name (he chooses them) and leads them out (John 10:3). So your choice of Christ was very different than his choice of you. His choice was a recreating, resurrecting, life-giving choice when he called you by name and you were born again and made a child of God. Your choice was all response and trust in his commitment to you.

The other sense in which Christ chose you differently than you chose him is in the call to ministry. Now all believers are chosen in that first sense, and can have the assurance that Christ's honor is at stake in their perseverance. And indeed all believers are chosen for ministry. But among the saints, whose responsibility is the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12), Christ sets some people apart as pastors and teachers to devote their full-time labor to the ministry of the word and prayer in order to equip the saints. Here again those who serve do so willingly. We have chosen the ministry. But if we are where we belong, there has been a call from the Lord preceding, equipping, inspiring and finally enabling our choice of the ministry. If this were not so, ordination would be a sham. For what we will do here in the next few minutes in the laying on of hands is confirm not Glen's choice of the ministry, but God's choice of Glen. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Therefore, be encouraged, Glen, be very bold in your work, for Christ is for you and his very honor is at stake in your success.

"And I have appointed you that you go and bear fruit." If the origin and assurance of your ministry is election, Glen, the immediate aim is fruit-bearing. The context of John 15:1-16 answers three questions

about this task. First, what is it? Second, how shall we accomplish it? And, third, to what end should it be pursued?

First, what is fruit-bearing? What is the fruit you are called to bear--indeed must bear? I think fruit in this chapter is a broad term and embraces two things: love for people and the conversion of sinners. If you bear fruit you love people and win people to Christ. Let's take love first. The picture in verses 1 and 2 is that Christ is like a vine and you, his minister, are like a branch shooting off this vine. And God the Father is like the vinedresser who prunes back the branches so they bear the most fruit. Since the fruit is simply the out-forming of what has passed through the branch from the vine, we should ask, What is it that we receive from the vine? Jesus' answer is love. Abiding in Jesus means abiding in his love according to verse 9--"As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. Abide in my love." "Abide in me" is replaced by "Abide in my love," and this shows more specifically what we receive when we are united to the vine, namely the sap of divine love. And it stands to reason then that what we receive from the vine flows through the branch and crops out in the fruit of love, for the nourishment and refreshment of other people.

There is another way to see the same thing. Verse 2 says that if you don't bear fruit you don't abide in the vine; you get snapped off and thrown in the fire (v. 6). So in order to abide in the vine or to abide in Christ's love, we must bear fruit. There is an exact parallel to that thought in verse 10: "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love." So "If you keep my commandments" and "if you bear fruit" mean the same thing. Or at least we can say that fruit-bearing includes keeping the commandments of Jesus. And if we ask, what is it in this context that Jesus means by "commandments" the answer again is love. Verse 12: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." And verse 17: "these things I command you, that you love one another." Therefore, love is fulfilling the commands of Jesus. And fulfilling the commands of Jesus is at least part of what it means to bear fruit. Therefore, bearing fruit means loving other people. It means letting the love which we constantly receive from Christ as we abide in him flow through us and out to others for their benefit.

But I think the term "fruit" in this gospel is very broad and also includes the making of new disciples. In John 4:35,36 Jesus says, "Do not say, 'There are yet four months and then comes the harvest. I tell you lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.'" "Fruit for eternal life" in John 4:36 probably corresponds to fruit that abides in John 15:16 which says, "I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide. This would refer then to the fruitfulness of winning others to Christ who are then guarded by God's power for salvation.

But probably in the mind of Christ these two meanings of the fruit-bearing merged into one. If the fruit is the out-cropping of the love of Christ in our lives for the nourishment and refreshment of others, then surely among the benefits received from that fruit would be conversion. John 13:34,35 gives one example of how this happens: "A new commandment I give you that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The most winning and powerful witness we can give is the reality of love. So the fruitfulness of obedient love and the fruitfulness of winning people to Christ are really not two different things. They are one. And that is the aim of all your ministry.

The second question that Jesus answers here about fruit-bearing is how it can be accomplished. The answer he gives (and the word is repeated 10 times) is: "Abide in me and I in you" (v. 4). Keep yourself attached, closely attached to the vine. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He abides in me, and I in him,

he it is that bears much

fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5). Everything that you try to do, Glen, will come to nothing unless you do it through a conscious, abiding dependence on the enablement of Christ. No matter what I say tonight, Glen, you make it your aim for the rest of your life to discover in ever deeper experience what it means to abide in Christ. It is the secret of all fruitfulness.

There are several pointers in the text that help us discover what this means in practice. One is in verse 7: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you." Abiding in Christ involves letting his words abide in us. Notice how these two things come together: the word abiding in you and effectual prayer. Glen, here is the first and decisive line of battle in your ministry. You must, you must resist everything that would pull you away from rigorous study of God's Word and daily hours of prayerful meditation to let that word sink in and abide. The inwardly abiding word is a truth of Scripture believed, cherished, and rolled back and forth in the imagination until its implications spill over into daily life as love and joy and peace and righteousness. The word will not abide within us if we are in a hurry. We pastors deceive ourselves when we are so busy doing good things that we snatch a text and a prayer on the run and think that we will be mighty men of God and bear spiritual fruit. To be very specific, Glenn, so that you will remember it, almost no minister of the Gospel will be a spiritually fruitful person if he is spending less than two hours a day in prayer and meditation in addition to his sermon preparation. Holy, powerful, life-changing spiritual men of God are not made on the run. There are so few people who believe that, Glen, that the expectations laid on you in the service will probably be a constant threat to your spiritual power and fruitfulness. But Christ has appointed you to go and bear fruit. So resist those expectations with boldness.

One other pointer toward the practical meaning of abiding in Christ is the parallel phrase in verse 9: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love." Christ's present love for me is his commitment to give me, right now and forever, everything that is good for me. Therefore, abiding in his love means constantly receiving as from his loving hand all things as good for me. It means never doubting that he is doing me good, but always resting in his kindness. There is a great freedom in the ministry, Glen, when you are confident that every hospital room you enter, every counseling session you conduct, every committee you attend and every pulpit into which you ascend is a place where the Lord of all loves you, that is, will do what is good for you. Believing that and acting on it is what it means to abide in the love of Christ. And if you do these things, you will bear much fruit.

Finally and briefly, the end for which you seek to bear fruit is not just your own joy (v. 11) or the benefit of your people: it is that God the Father might be glorified. Verse 8: "In this is my Father glorified: that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." The chief end of man and the chief end of ministry is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. God is committed by the very nature of his divine righteousness to always act on behalf of his glory. He wills to display it and magnify it. And that brings us back to where we began. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." The honor of Christ is at stake in whether you, whom he chose, bear fruit. But not only that, his father is glorified when you bear much fruit. And therefore his glory is at stake in the fruitfulness of your ministry. Therefore, Glen and Ruth, every day of your life and throughout all your ministry you can pray with tremendous confidence: Have mercy upon us, O God, and help us, Lord Jesus, lest your name be dishonored and your glory diminished.

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