

Pruning & Bearing Fruit

by Robert B. Thompson

God's purpose in man is to show forth to the angels and principalities in the heavens what His standards are through the moral image of Jesus Christ, and the church's role is to be the moral light of the world, revealing God's will and being a testimony to it.

Duration: 1:17:59

Scripture: Isaiah 61:11, Matthew 5:14

Topics: "Righteous Living", "Moral Integrity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of living according to God's moral standards. He highlights four key aspects that Jesus exemplified: his words, behavior, inner condition, and his relationship with God the Father. These qualities are also mentioned in Psalm 24, John 14, and Revelation 14. The speaker explains that as Christians, we are called to be the moral light of the world, reflecting the full expression of the Ten Commandments. Ultimately, God's intention for the church is to glorify Him through righteous living, just as Jesus did.

Transcript

As we come unto you tonight, it is with thanksgiving and praise. Oh, hallelujah, Lord, we do give praise to you. Thank you, Lord.

Surely it's true that goodness and mercy follows us all the days of our life. And, Lord, we see those little touches from time to time, and we're thankful for them. Praise your name.

We pray tonight for Don Schulte. Lord, he's not eating. We just pray for Audrey, that you'll strengthen her and give her wisdom and peace, Lord, and touch Don.

Home where he is, that they'll take more careful attention of him, Lord, in Jesus' name. Be with him, we pray, and with Audrey. And, Lord, with each household represented here, we pray your peace and your protection and health.

Oh, God, freedom from accident and injury. And, Lord, as we proceed tonight, Lord, we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide in what is said and proceed, that your word may go forth in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's turn to John 15. This is kind of continuing with the idea that we're talking about Sunday night, the sower. The fact that the kingdom of God is something in us.

It's not a place where we're going. It's what is happening to us. And I don't know if it'll happen to us any better in heaven, if it'll happen at all.

I just don't understand what goes on in heaven. But I do know the promises of the Bible always and exclusively have to do with our relationship with God. In fact, the Bible is not even presented as a place of safety.

Heaven is not presented even as a place of safety. But our safety is where? It's in Christ. You know, the Lord is our high tower.

And so whatever we're going to do, we do it here, I guess. I guess when we die, according to the scriptures, we rest. It's a place of rest.

After death, the Lord said to Daniel, go thy way, you'll rest and then stand in your lot at the end of the days. So when you are had it down here and God has finished with you for now, you go and rest. And then evidently, life continues when the Lord returns pretty much.

And I don't see any scriptural exception to that, except possibly Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. So I don't know whether that's just them or what, but it seems that when we die, we rest. It's a place of rest.

You'll rest with your fathers as many times in the Old Testament. It's a place of rest. How many are tired and want to rest? I think it's a place of rest.

But what's going to happen as far as the plan of redemption is concerned is happening here and now. And that's impressed much on my mind because I feel that the Lord is speaking to this church and probably many other churches. And he's saying he wants us to pay special attention because he's bringing forth Christ in us to a greater extent than before in history for most people.

And we're just going to have to be more diligent, be very diligent. I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. He's the farmer.

He's the farmer. And Christ is the vine that God has planted. Christ is the rootstock.

He's the thing that God wants. He's the kind of plant that God wants. I am the vine.

My father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. You know, that's amazing that he would start off immediately when discussing this with something negative.

But he did. And there's always a reason for the placement and the ordering of things. And he's letting us know right off the bat this very significant statement.

It's a very significant statement. You know, the longer I live, the more I can see the difference between being in Christ and being a Christian and religion. And religion.

We don't realize how much of our life is religious. And I'm not doubting religion because as long as we're human beings in this world, we have to be kind of anchored to something. But I think little by little, the Lord is showing us there's a lot of stuff that really is not the real stuff.

It's just things that we do. And so, and this is brought out in this parable of the vine. And Emily was on the board, John 15.

It's up there. I am the vine. You are the branches.

And he says, I am the true vine. And the first thing he says, I am the vine. I'm the kind of fruit that God wants.

I'm what God wants. And my Father is the husband. And then right away, he says, he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.

Now, that so cuts across our religious thinking that it's astonishing. Because we have all these ideas of what constitutes a Christian and what it means to keep with the program. And of course, in our humanistic age, there's a lot of talk about, well, once you go through the four steps of salvation, you can never be lost and all this kind of stuff.

But that's just humanistic thinking. It isn't Bible. Yes, Larry.

No, and that is, honestly, I hate to say this, really, but an awful lot of this pressure for evangelism is not coming from God. In fact, it detracts from the work of God. It does not augment it.

It detracts and sidetracks it. So, the fact, it dovetails into church growth. And I heard a minister not too long ago complaining because the people in this little church, as he put it, huddled.

They didn't go out and bring more in. They didn't go out and bring more in. But then there was another minister in the same meeting who hit it right on the head.

Hit it right on the head. It wasn't me. It was another guy.

But it stuck with me. It was so true. And he also has a small church.

And he said, you know, the Lord has spoken to me. Never mind who comes and who doesn't. He said, you minister to the people that I sent to you.

And this guy has labored faithfully for years with a handful of people. And they come and they go. And just when he thinks he's got something going, five of them will leave.

Audrey heard a preacher saying, evidently he's having some pressure in his church. And he was over the radio saying to the people, do you realize the first church split happened in heaven? I never thought that was an angle there. But anyway, did you pick up on that? Yeah.

But anyway, to see the two different opposite viewpoints. One, the Lord is telling this faithful pastor, I will send the people. And you just feed the people that God sends to you.

And you see, that rings with me. Because the Lord has told me that many times. He says, you take care of the word.

I'll take care of the attendants. But this fellow said that God spoke the words that he did to him so loud he thought other people in the house could hear it. It was that clear.

But it stuck with me. And I thought that's right. Because this other minister that was saying, see the Lord didn't tell him that people were huddling.

The Lord didn't tell him that. He's discontent because they're not going out and bringing people in. But you see, if you look at the New Testament, there's no accent on church growth.

None whatever. But there's a lot of accent on being faithful with God's word. And so, much of this idea of bearing fruit, being evangelism, is totally sidetracking of God's will.

Totally sidetracking because you end up with a million babies. And no one who has any kingdom strength is able to do anything. As we go along you'll see why it's so important that we understand this is talking about character transformation.

And not about proselyting or getting other people to subscribe to your religion. But it won't fit. Alright, now every branch in me that bears no fruit, he cuts off.

And you see how horrible that would be? He's saying if you don't go out and save souls, I'm going to cut you off from Christ. Whoa. Right there, see.

No preacher that's concerned about huddling would ever say that. Because that doesn't even fit with what he believes. See, so the whole thing is a mess.

But we need to understand that God has a very primary, a very fundamental purpose in our bearing fruit. And that fruit is the moral image of Jesus Christ. In other words, the fruit is the Ten Commandments in shoe leather.

Now when God called out the first segment of his church, his royal priesthood. He called out the Jews by race. And he gave them the thing that he wanted them to support and spread above all else.

And what was that? The law, the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments. And when the Jews went into Canaan, they carried with them the Ark of the Covenant.

And the Covenant was referring to the two tables of stone in the Ark. Because you see, mankind never before had that kind of understanding of God's requirements. Never before.

It was entrusted to the Jews. And when it went into Canaan, it was a judgment on the gods of Canaan. You shall have no other gods before me.

Canaanites had gods coming out their ears. You shall make no graven images. They made their sheriff poles, their worship of lust.

You know, you shall not swear, keep my Sabbath and so on. And when it came in there, it was a judgment on those gods. So Israel, the first half of Israel, we're the second half of Israel, it's all one thing.

Had brought what God's intention is for the world. And God wants the world to understand His moral rules, His nature. What He requires of all of His creatures.

God wants that more than anything else. See, He's got a sick world. He's got a world that is destroying itself.

And it's destroying itself because it has improper relationships with God and with other people. And that's the basis of the destruction that's going on. And the Ten Commandments deal with our relationship with God and with other people.

And so the world will never be anything but a howling nightmare of insanity until the people of the world, including God's people, keep His laws. Of course, now it's greatly expanded, but the Ten Commandments are written in our heart and mind, greatly enlarged and made more comprehensive. So I'm not speaking about the original Ten Commandments.

That was an abridged form of the eternal moral law of God. But the point is that God has one purpose. Now, He had a rebellion in heaven.

That's what the preacher was talking about. The first church split happened in heaven where there was a division between the righteous and the wicked. And evidently, up to that time, there had been no law.

Because, you see, there had been no unrighteousness. So there was no such thing as sin. There was no such thing as sin until Satan acted in his own will.

And when he did, then you had a need for a law that described what righteousness is. But before that, you did not have any need. So God, in His disappointment with the angels, made a new race of beings called man.

And His whole purpose in man is to show forth to the... Not His whole purpose, but one of His main purposes in man, is to show forth to the angels and the principalities in the heavens, both those who maintain their role with God and those who rebel, what His standards are. And that came out in the Ten Commandments. And Satan knows that.

He knows that's the first time God spoke since the rebellion. That He would make known the difference between right and wrong. And, of course, that tree was planted in the garden.

The knowledge of good and evil, as well as the tree of life. The knowledge of good and evil is the eternal moral law of God. And it's a good tree, but you don't want to eat of it before you eat of the tree of life, which they did, and that's why they died.

They couldn't handle it, and God knew they couldn't handle it. But the Ten Commandments basically are a judgment against Satan and the fallen angels. And now God has brought forth a new race, man, destined to be God's judges.

And they will judge the world, and they will judge angels. Do you know where that's found? No man will judge the angels. 1 Corinthians 6. Know ye not that we shall judge angels.

So all judgment is given to Jesus Christ, and through Him, to those who are an integral part of Him. Not those who are just of the Christian religion, but those who are an integral part of Jesus, share with Him. And that's why He said, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.

So, judgment is basic to what has been going on for 6,000 years. It's a response to the creation of sin in the heavens. That's where it was created, in the heavens, in Satan.

Before that, there was no law because there was no sin. In fact, there was no knowledge of good and evil. There was no such thing as righteousness in heaven because righteousness is the opposite of

unrighteousness, and there was no unrighteousness.

Therefore, there was no need for knowledge of good and evil because it was all acceptable of God until Satan said, I will be like the Most High. And he brought that down into the earth, and this was exactly what God knew would happen because God is in the process. Now, God found in Jesus.

He said, because you have love righteousness and hated iniquity, which is lawlessness, I have exalted you above your fellows. I have given you the oil of joy. I have anointed you with the oil of joy above your fellows.

And then again, He says, thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. And at that point, God took the word, the eternal word, the logos, and He made him the vine. He made him the root, the vine.

This is what God is saying. This and this alone is what I will accept. And by that He meant the moral character of Christ, which is shown in part in the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, and long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control is part of the moral image of Jesus Christ.

You have to add to this courage and other things to get the whole picture. But God said, this is what I want. I'm not taking anything else.

So forget it, boys. This is it. Okay? That's the vine.

That's the vine. God planted the vine. And that's the vine.

And the vine is Israel because Israel is married, is the bride of God. As it says in the Old Testament, also the New. But Israel of the Old could not show in themselves the law of God because Christ, who is the law of God, was not in them.

Christ, who is the covenant of God, was not in them. That cannot happen until you're born again. But He gave it to them.

He wrote it with His own finger on slabs of granite so that mankind, Israel the priesthood first, and then through Israel the rest of mankind, as well as the angels, would have a way of understanding that God is saying, this is my law that governs all of my creatures. You will have no gods before me. Satan tried to be another god.

He said, I have no gods before me. And Satan heard that loud and clear. Don't worry.

Don't make any images. Don't make anything with your hands and worship it. Watch your mouth.

And don't take the name of God lightly. And then He gave us the Sabbath day once a week and then He expanded it greatly to where we live wholly in God doing His will. And then on with other laws of relationships about honoring your father and your mother and about stealing and about adultery, union that is not ordained of God and bearing false witness.

And God said, this is what I am. I do not change it. And this is Jesus Christ.

He shows all of these to perfection. To perfection. He is divine.

Now where is God going with this? God's intention in the church is that it be the moral light of the world. That in the church, mankind can see the full expression of the Ten Commandments. The full ramifying out

of all elements of it.

Like about swearing. It goes out to every iota of word. Watch your mouth.

What you say. Jesus said, you are going to be judged by what you say. And let your yes be yes and your no be no because whatever is more than this comes of evil.

And James talked about it. So it's expanded out in many ways that it was not expanded under the first covenant. But its essence is the same.

And that's why the new covenant is the writing of the Torah of God on our mind and in our heart. Now where is God going with this? Where God is going with this is He wants people who are not carrying around the law of God in a box. But they themselves are the law made flesh.

So that in them you can see what it means to love God above everything else. And how He deals with us and so painfully to bring that to pass in our lives. So that you can see in us people who do not their own will but only God's will at all times.

So you can see in us people who speak like Jesus. Every word has meaning. It's constructive.

It's edifying. It's heavier than a universe full of sand. Every word.

Remember God spoke about one of the Samuel. He doesn't let any of His words fall to the ground. All I'm doing is telling you where God is going.

I'm prophesying to the bones. But God will do it. So just hang loose.

I'm telling you this is the way. And the Spirit of God will help you to walk in it. Alright? So we are being made the moral law of God so that people can see that.

And that's why Jesus said you are the light in Matthew 5, you are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Don't put your light under a cover up with a bushel basket.

But let your light so shine that men may see your good works. That is the morality of God's law and then they will glorify God. And that is God's purpose under the new covenant.

And that's why He says in John 15 immediately He says I am the vine. Well He is. He is the word made flesh.

He is what God wants everybody to read. Living epistles Paul said. You are becoming living epistles.

Written by the Spirit of God on the fleshly tables of your heart. Known and read of all men. Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit.

It says in Isaiah. I am the true vine and my Father is the farmer. And then immediately He cuts off every branch in me that does not bear fruit.

And that shows the fallacy of our approach to salvation. See we say to be saved you must go through four theological steps. You must believe this and believe that and believe the next thing and you are saved.

Well let's put it a little differently. If you do that you are embarked on you are permitted into the program. But then you have to work it out.

And that program has one goal in mind. And that is to make you the light of the world. And that's its goal.

Now whether you enjoy paradise or not you shall but whether you do or not it's not germane and it's not of the essence. The essence is God has a need. That's the essence of it.

God has a need and that need is to reveal to His creation His will. And that's why you've been called out of the world. Okay? Now you can see given that why if you don't bear fruit God cuts you out of the vine.

Well what do you cut out of? Well you cut out of Christ. Well what happens if you cut out of Christ? What happens to a branch that is cut out of a vine? Well it dies. There's nothing there.

Now that may seem very harsh because we think in terms of salvation as God making it possible when we die to go to heaven. That's not what it's all about. What it's all about is God creating a testimony to His will among the nations of the earth.

That's why you were called into the church is that you might bear fruit. Jesus said a little later on in this chapter I have ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit. Because that's what God wants.

He's the farmer and He wants fruit. In upstate New York there's a lot of apple trees. In fact one of our relatives has or had he's old now, he's dead and his wife is still living I don't know why they still have it but they had quite an apple orchard.

Well, you know, farming is like any other business you've got to make it pay, you've got to make a profit. And ground is valuable. So if you have a tree there and it doesn't bring forth apples it's going nowhere.

It's no good. You're not looking for a shade tree. You have one thing, what you're after is money to keep your life going and that money comes when you sell apples.

And so you put those trees in there and you work on them and you hire help to go around and weed around them and plant them and water them and prune them and take care of them and spray them so they don't get diseases. You do that for one reason. You don't want to see a bunch of trees out there.

You want apples because that's your living. That's where you support your family. That's how you send your children to college.

That's how you put food on the table. It's for those apples. You sell them.

And so a farmer knows farming is a risky business. You get a bad year or you get a bad disease comes in or something else comes in and you can lose your shirt and lose your farm. So you've got to be on the stick with what you're doing.

Now see that's a whole new concept of God. That's a whole new concept of God. It fits the parable of the talents, doesn't it? God says, you knew I'm a businessman.

You knew I'm strict. I want profit. Now the profit that God gets in us is an evidence of the nature of Jesus so that the people around you can see what God requires of human beings.

Now that isn't needed in the United States, is it? We don't need that at all. We don't need that in the high schools. We don't need that in the workplace.

We don't need people who show forth the life of Jesus, do we? All we need is people that invite us to church, right? We've got our religion mixed up with God's plan. God isn't interested in getting a lot of trees into his orchard. Better to have one tree with fruit than a thousand trees with no fruit.

And if you tell the trees with no fruit to go out and get more trees because that's fruit, it's kind of a confusing situation. No, the fruit that he's talking about here is the fruit of the Spirit. Okay? I think that's rather plain.

And when we don't bear it, we're cut out of the vine which shows us that it's not something you take or leave. Now you can watch people in church, attend church for 30 years and they don't change. I pondered that, I pondered that.

What is wrong? What are we doing wrong? Why do not people change? How can they be under the word for 15 years and remain carnal? How can that be? And I'm not sure I understand the answer to it. But I would say that if the preacher's doing his part, they're not doing theirs because the very nature of redemption is personal change. It's the very nature of it is becoming a new creation.

And when this isn't happening, we're not in Christ. It matters if any man be in Christ, there is a new creation. Not if any man be in the Christian religion, but if any man be in Christ.

And if there's no new creation, if we're still what we were a year ago, we're not being saved. Salvation is a process that you work out with fear and trembling. And we're not being saved if we're exactly the same, we're still critical, we still have unforgiveness, we're still telling off-color jokes, we're still the same old person we were.

We're not being saved. Salvation is a process. We're not bearing fruit, therefore there's a danger.

Okay? Oh, hallelujah. I knew you'd enjoy that. Alright.

While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes it. Now what is that like? That means that our life has in it much frustration. Because just as we get going, something happens and clips it off.

Now, if you go out into a branch and you see a branch that bears fruit, you'll notice that in addition to bearing fruit, I'm talking about branches now, we are not vines, we're branches, okay? In addition to bearing fruit, it bears a lot of leaves and twigs and new shoots that come off it and starting new branches and other things. And this is not the way that you get good fruit. So, let's say this branch has borne some fruit, but it's also borne a lot of leaves.

Now, from the tree's standpoint, leaves may be really nice. Think, oh boy, this is fleshing me out here. I've got these leaves.

Look at the symmetry. I'm a beautiful tree. But you see, the farmer doesn't want leaves.

They're no good to him. No good whatever. He doesn't want any leaves there.

The tree may want them, the farmer doesn't want them. So what does he do? He cuts the branch back. And with it goes parts of the places that bore fruit as well as all these leaves and little new things coming

off and everything else that all goes off is burned.

Okay, well when the life comes into the tree in the spring, then it's not all pouring out in leaves and branches that are going nowhere. You have to prune down. I spent one summer when I was working my way through Bible school, thinning corn.

Now, you don't do this in Iowa because they get a lot of rain. In California, they don't get enough rain. This was down in Chula Vista.

So you can't grow good corn there unless you thin it out. So you wait until the ears are up. They're coming up.

You've got some ears going. The stalk's up. The ears are coming up.

And then somebody has to go through and this is back-breaking work. Believe me. Because your work bent over.

And you go through like this, ripping off every ear except two on each stalk. It all goes to the pigs. Because if you don't, you're going to get six or eight run ears because there's not enough rain in Chula Vista as there is in Iowa to give you, say, five good ears of corn off that stalk.

You're not going to get it. You're going to get a bunch of little old ears because the life of the plant is being distributed to all these ears. They're all claiming some of the life from it.

The chlorophyll or however corn is made. And so you rip it off and throw it to the hogs. And then you get two good ears there.

Now that's what God does with us. He's not looking for... You know, we get a lot of stuff going in our life. And we're branching out here.

We're branching out there. We've got this going. We've got that going.

The next thing... And God lets it go for a while. Because there's some good there. And then He proves it back.

He says, I don't need all this stuff. And that is a very disappointing experience. Because we are dearly in love with everything we're doing.

And every aspect of our personality. And we don't want to lose any of it. It's like a novice pruning.

He goes up to prune and he figures well, you know, it's the sun acting on the leaves that is giving life to this plant. And so he'll, you know, get a little pair of scissors and clip off a leaf or two and it breaks his heart. Because he feels, you know, I'm losing my tree here.

But someone who knows what they're doing doesn't have time. Maybe they've got to prune a hundred trees in a day. And all they do is they go through and rip, rip, rip, rip, rip.

So that the trees... So the birds can fly through it. And then they're on to the next one and they're on to the next one. And you've got piles of branches on the ground.

That's heartbreaking if you're a very tender gardener. You're a plant. Well, that's the way we are with our lives.

We feel that every little thing has significance in the kingdom. But it may not even be sinful. It may be perfectly alright.

But God said this is taking life from this person. It's not going anywhere. It's just run ears.

There's nothing there. Bing, bing, bing, it goes. And we don't know what's going on.

And we think the devil's got in and God's left. And we hurt. And we're so disappointed.

And our friends criticize us. And everything else goes wrong. Because we have been pruned back.

And let me tell you, there's a lot of the Christian life that is pruning. And when God has someone that He wants to get especially rich fruit out of, He really holds them back. I mean, He holds them back.

And of course, they don't understand that. He says, Sing, oh barren, sing. Sing! Lord, everybody's having children all over the place.

And I don't have any children. What's there to sing about? He says, you're going to end up the new Jerusalem. You read that in Isaiah 54.

Yeah, you're going to. Oh boy. You're in for wonderful stuff.

Let's take a look at that. Isaiah 54. Because maybe somebody in here right now has a season of barrenness.

But I'll tell you this. I was telling Isaiah 54 up to the archangel up there and it'll appear up here. Now, how far you can go in Christ depends on how willing you are to be pruned.

And God will not transgress your personality too much. If He sees that you've reached just about as much as you can handle without acting out in some negative way, then God's going to back off. He's going to back off.

He doesn't want to ruin you and destroy you and have you going around so gloomy and full of doom and everything that you're spiritually unhealthy. So always keep a good attitude toward God. And if it seems He's picking you to pieces, say, pick on, Lord.

Pick on. Keep it up. Because God has your good in mind.

Don't cling to the leaves when God goes to cut it off. They cut away. There won't be anything left.

Let God worry about that. But the world is waiting for my ministry. They're all going to hell and here I am doing nothing.

You know, Jesus got an awful lot done in three years. And He didn't do much traveling either. Just a little area He traveled around in.

But He changed the course of the world. God can get a lot done in three years. Yes? Yes, it is.

It surely is. Oh, barren woman, you know, burst into something. You know, in those days, if you didn't bear a child, particularly a male child, you were kind of despised by your husband or your neighbors.

And God says, you don't have any kids, get a bigger house because you're going to have them. You will spread out to the right and left. Your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.

I mean, that's not a small promise. That's not a small promise for someone who has no children. If you think about it, your descendants will dispossess nations when you have no children.

So here's somebody that's living by faith in the promise of God with no evidence that anything is going to happen. Now, you may be here tonight and you may have a real zeal to bear fruit. A real zeal to bear fruit.

And as far as you can tell, nothing's happening. But God has spoken to you about things. Let God be God.

Just let God be God. You go out and raise up your ishmaels, all you're going to create is a wild man. Just let God be God.

He cares more about the world than you or I do. Yes, He does. He cares more about sinners going to hell than you and I do.

He sure does. Do not be afraid. You will not suffer shame.

You say, but I'm getting old! And nothing's happening! Do not be afraid. You will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace.

You will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widow. Isn't that a wonderful promise? Isn't that magnificent? Isn't that something? For your Maker is your husband.

The Lord Almighty is His name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He is called the God of all the earth.

There are so many instances in the Bible where this has been true like Sarah and Elizabeth and Hannah. But you know, Hannah is particularly touching because Elkanah had two wives and this other one was always giving Hannah the business. Did you ever read that? And he's tormenting her.

He said, I'm better to you than ten sons. Don't worry about it. But when she had a son, she had a whopper.

And if you'll notice, to read your Bible, after that she had more children. You see, God had, when God's bringing forth light, He goes through this withholding of what you want. It's just, you're creating energy within there and God's building within there and wisdom and you're going through all these and preparing you.

God is preparing you. Always do what is practical but don't try to kick the door down. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit.

And Hannah had to go through that. She just had to go through that. Why couldn't she just have Samuel in a nice way like everybody else? No, that would be funny.

And the same way with Sarah. You know, here's her handmaid mocking her. Can't have kids.

This is stressing. And if you're anxious to go in the ministry and you've got the call of God in your life, this is stressing for God not to be using you. Not to see some great thing coming forth.

That's the way it is. A wife who married young only to be rejected. And notice this because it's key to the way God works with people.

For a brief moment, I abandon you. See, and that's what we can't understand. Everybody else is doing fine.

The Lord's talking to them. You know, whatever they do, they've got the Midas touch. It works.

Everything's great. And here you are trying to figure out where God is and he's abandoned you. That's what he does.

With his choice ones. He abandons them. And you've got to hang steady.

Have faith in God. Because when God is going to bring forth unusual fruit, he uses unusual means. You know, Jesus said to his brothers, your time is always ready.

You can go up there anytime you want to. Up to wherever they were going, the Lazarus, I guess. You can go anytime you want to.

I see Jesus moved in the touch of God. He had to wait. Sisters were in distress and crying.

He said to his brother, you go, that's the way it is with other people. I can do whatever they want, wherever they want to. But you can't.

If God's in on you, you can't. Boy. Alright, isn't that a happy thought? But with deep compassion.

Now notice this. In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you for a moment. Now, that's very confusing to God's people.

They say, why would God be angry with someone whose only problem was God hadn't done anything for them? So what's for anger? And the reason for that is that every one of us has things in our personality that God does not like. And he doesn't pinpoint those when we first get saved. He does not do that.

But there comes a time in our Christian life when God decides to take us to a higher plane. But we can't be in that higher plane because how many remember the four things in the 24th Psalm we talked about Sunday? If you're going to ascend the hill of the Lord. Do you remember that? Do you remember what they were? There were four things.

If you're going to ascend and stand in this holy place, what they were? Do you remember that? You have to have a pure heart. Clean hands. Huh? Now that's another place in Isaiah.

That's in Isaiah where he says, who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings. And that's also true. But in Psalm 24 there's four things.

That you practice righteousness. That you have a pure heart. That you have not lifted up your soul to an idol.

That you don't swear falsely. Remember that? That's in Psalm 24. Now see, those four things cover what Jesus is.

How he behaves. His inner condition. The fact that he has only one God, the Father.

And that he does not speak idle words. He doesn't swear falsely. Those four things are what Jesus is.

And you find the same thing in John 14 where you find the first fruits on Mount Zion because those are the requisites for climbing Mount Zion. And you'll find the same four things. There's no guile in their mouth.

Remember? There's no lie in them. That's in Revelation 14. Talking about the first fruits standing on Mount Zion.

You find those same four things in there. Condition of our heart. How we behave.

How we talk. And our attitude toward God. And we weren't born with those things right in us.

And when we first get saved, we can go on for ten years and God doesn't touch them. He may work around them a little bit, but he doesn't really get at the heart of them. And then God decides, okay, they've done really good.

Graduation here. So God decides to take you to a higher level. And when he does, he comes down and he looks at that idolatry.

And he looks at that mouth that runs off all the time. And he looks at the lack of love of God. The unwillingness to surrender idols.

And he sees the unrighteous behavior. The conning. The manipulations of people.

And the self-seeking. The other things that we do. And he is angry with that.

He says, God is angry. Yes. He's angry with that stuff.

And he goes to war against it. And he deals with it. And it hurts.

It hurts. Boy, when God begins to get after our idols. And we got, God goes down and he finds the thing we love the most.

And then he asks for it. Like Isaac. And if you think that's easy, brother or sister, you ain't been there.

If you think it's easy to hang on the cross, when inside you're screaming like a pig that's being slaughtered, it's like Jacob. It's like Jacob. See, what he loved best was his wife, his wives, and four of them, and his children.

And he thought, he's coming up here to kill them all. And me along with it all. How's this treasure out there? And he did what you have to do when God calls for your treasures.

Instead of, he could have gone out and thought, how will I line this up? He had hired servants. What we'll do is we'll get the family over here and then we'll dig trenches or whatever. Or we'll set an ambush or we'll outflank him or we'll do something here and we'll see if we can't kill him.

Because he had many servants there and they had weapons. But he did the right thing. Instead of manipulating the situation, he went to God.

And he wrestled with God. You have to do that because God will not have idols. God may deal with your mouth.

God may deal with your relationships with people. God may deal with your heart. People can sit in church and talk in tongues and prophesy and they're so sweet and their heart is a nest of vipers.

It comes out eventually. God said, I don't want that in there. And boy does he have his ways of cleaning out those snake pits.

Boy, I swear you're never going to make it. But remember, you're not going backward but forward. See, it isn't that you suddenly backslid.

It's that that was there all the time. It was there all the time. And you didn't realize it.

So that's what it means. That's the 24th Psalm. Back to Isaiah 54 if you will.

In a surge of anger, God hides his face and we say, where are you Lord? I used to pray and you were right there. I had a happy heart and everything was going swell and now look at it. Remember it.

It happens. It can happen. And the severity depends on the rank and the kingdom of which you've been called.

Not everybody drinks the same cup. But boy, when it's given to you, you have to drink it to the last drop. You can't calm the situation, drink half and pour the rest on the ground.

I mean, you've got to drink it to the last drop. And the higher the rank and the kingdom to which you're called, the more bitter that cup is. Because those that God has very close to him, he doesn't want anything in them that reminds him of Satan.

Alright, now look to me. To me, this is like the days of Noah when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn I will not be angry with you.

Never again. That's it. It's over.

It's finished. It's not going to happen again. So if you don't quit, if you don't give up, and what people do, I'll tell you, when God asks for their treasures, it's very hard for them to give them up.

You're tearing the heart out of me. Yes, he will. He'll do that.

He'll tear the heart out of you. But it's about as hard as you make it. When you recognize this has got to go, you know, like the Lord said to Abraham, offer up Isaac.

There's no use prolonging it and thinking about it, because you'll end up not doing it. Or discussing it with your wife. Or discussing it with the servants.

Or anything else. Or running and trying to find Melchizedek. Because you're only delaying when God says it.

Abraham got up in the morning, and up the hill he went. And that's the way to deal with it when God asks for something. And it's about as hard as you make it.

If you keep thinking about it, saying, isn't this awful? Oh, God, it's awful. It'll keep getting worse and worse until it grinds you to powder. You fasten on your cross and it'll grind you into the ground.

What you do is pick it up and carry it, and look around and you'll find some little happy things that take your mind off all of what you can't have. Think about what you can have. It's an art to carry the cross, let me tell you.

And the longer you carry it, the easier it gets. You get used to it. And you don't expect to always have everything what you want.

You take what God gives you and rejoice over that and what you can't have? Fine. You put all your hopes and your treasures beyond the grave. You put your hopes and your treasures beyond the grave.

Because you don't know what God's going to do in this life. And then you're free. Because God takes everything, He can't take any more.

And what you'll find is that all He did was remove your bondages. And six months later, that which you thought, I can't live with all that! You say, what I see in that? It's a release It sets you free! Because otherwise you're continually tormented with fear of losing something and God doesn't want you tormented. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart.

You shall have no gods before me. But it isn't easy. It's painful when God is hiding His face from you for a moment.

Alright. But once it's over it can only go so far. And once it's over you'll know God.

Your name will change from Jacob the supplanter the grasper the one who can't stand upright because he's been wounded in the heel. Jacob is the heel snatcher. Shifty.

He's called Jacob because he grabbed his brother by the heel when he was being born. From the time the man was being born he was seeking the preeminence. Old Jacob the heel.

He's a heel. How many here are heels? Well anyway. But he wrestled with God and you know that's an amazing thing because God could have squashed him just like He can squash you and me.

But God doesn't violate a person's integrity. He will not do that. God is a perfect gentleman when it comes to your integrity.

He will not cross past your integrity. And so that gives you kind of a handle because Jacob was saying this is what I want. I want to be blessed Lord.

Forget it buddy. Oh I'm not taking that for an answer. I want to be blessed.

And by this time he began to forget about his four wives and all his kids. And he kept concentrating on God. He says what is your name? Who are you? All of a sudden everything went.

Esau went. All the problems went. And he began to think about who am I wrestling with here? That's the way it happens.

That was the most blessed episode of his life. That which was the death of tragedy became the very thing that changed his name and his nature. And gave his name to how many people? To the very race.

Israel. Israel. Israel.

See what came out of one man's agony? Fruit. Look what came out of the agony of Christ and Gethsemane. We would rather not go that way.

But that's God's way. When he has unusual fruit for you. He's going to bring you to unusual cups to drink.

And if you save your life you abide alone, but if you die you bear much fruit. And the word Israel means he struggles with God. I've seen other translations, but the latest translation of the Hebrew, the one that's on the cutting edge now to my knowledge, he struggles with God.

Struggles. Current. He struggles with God.

And every true member of Israel is a struggler with God. Our battle is not with Satan. And it's not with people.

It's with God. We're struggling with God. And what is God doing? God says let me go.

No I won't. See that was his integrity. I will not let you go.

God will not violate that. God could have slapped him silly. He could have vaporized him.

But he will not cross his integrity. Here's the spirit down here that I created. And he's making a demand on me.

And it's a righteous demand. And I'm going to let him sweat it. And he did.

And he said I won't let you go until you bless me. And God said from now on your name will be Israel. You're not just the con artist.

The heel snatcher. You are Israel. And so he gave his name to his race.

But he was never the same was he? Because he went out of there halting on his thigh. He was a strong man when he went in. You remember when he first entered the land and there were shepherds there waiting to feed their sheep.

But the men hadn't come to roll away the massive stone. And along comes Rachel. And Jacob got so inflated he went there and moved the stone by himself.

He was a strong man. But he wasn't strong after that. He was limping.

And to know God to be called of God to bear fruit like our barren woman here. This is talking by the way about the new Jerusalem as we may see tonight. It requires barrenness.

It requires a time when you just hang on the cross. And that's it. Life is over.

There's nothing left. But God. And if you're not in deception, if you haven't brought this on yourself, but if you're truly in God's hand in this way, don't quit.

Just say I won't let you go until you bless me. I won't let you go until you bless me. And that doesn't mean you're striving or you're grasping.

Yes? You may end up weaker. You're weaker in yourself. Every time God moves in your life, you become weaker and stronger.

And that's where the fruit is. The fruit does not come out of our Adamic nature. So if we're going to really bear fruit, the Adamic nature has to be continually weakened.

He must increase. And when He increases, you've got the fruit. When you've got Christ, you've got the fruit.

But it will never come out of Adam. And that's the problem with religion. It addresses itself to Adam.

As I say, some of this is necessary. I'm not downing religion. But what God is after can never come out of Adam.

I don't care how churchified he is. What God is after cannot come out of the human nature. Because God is just not in the business of transforming.

He's after Christ. You going to be alright? And you need a cough drop? Alright. I was in that condition a month ago, wasn't I? At least you're not on the tape.

That is, if there's a burden tonight, and there is, and I pray hard, what is God saying tonight? God is saying to us tonight that for all of us to understand that what He is after will not be accomplished by our religious activities, but by allowing Him to bring forth Christ in us. That's what He's after. And that was the same burden Sunday.

And He wants us to pay attention to that, and to realize it's going to mean the suppressing, and in some cases, the cutting off, of that which we desire. It's like working with a continual frustration. You're going forward, and then you're frustrated.

Like Paul says, I'm perplexed. And I go forward, and then I'm knocked down, and I try to do this and that, and it seems like we're going nowhere. But this is the process.

This is the way it goes. And it's designed to cut back the flesh of which circumcision is a type. It's designed to cut back the flesh, and to keep bringing forth the life.

And to keep bringing forth the life. And what God wants us to do, the burden of the Lord on us this part of the month, is to work with God in this program. Not to struggle against it.

Because you can, as Larry brought out so clearly, you can, by using your religion, a concept of what Christianity is, you can actually fight against what God is trying to do in your life. Because you say, well, this can't be God, because I'm not bearing fruit. I'm not doing my religious thing like I want to go.

All these religious ideas I want to do, and I'm not able to do them. God keeps knocking me down on what's going on. And so, God wants us to understand that He's not asking us to produce something by our works.

He's asking us to abide in Christ so that Christ is glorified, and so that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He trends and cuts and guides and frustrates and blesses and everything else. Does that make sense?

That's the burden of the Lord. God wants Christ coming forth.

Hallelujah. I says Amen. Because I can feel the Lord.

I know that's what the burden is tonight. Alright, you want to run that up some more in the next verses? Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for... Where did it go? Laughter There we are. Someone's got a pointer.

Alright. Now notice that it's talking about the Holy City, isn't it? Who has compassion. O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires, your battlements of rubies, and so on.

See, this is in contrast to Babylon. Babylon is religion. Babylon the Great is religion.

All religion. And you'll notice that the voice of the bridegroom and the bride are in Babylon. They're in Babylon.

But the day will come when the voice of the bridegroom and the bride will no longer be heard in Babylon. Because Babylon is the murderer of the apostles and the prophets. Always.

Religion. Always. It will always fight Jesus Christ.

But God has his... the bride and the bridegroom are in religion in the present hour. But he's making us aware of the distinction and that if we are willing to be a barren... if we are willing to be barren... and that's basically what pruning is, isn't it? It's making a tree barren. That's what it's doing.

It's cutting it back and for a season. And that's what we are. And God says, that's my city.

And that's not Babylon. That's the New Jerusalem. That's Sarah who is above, who is the mother of us all.

Alright, then he says, all your sons will be taught by the Lord and great will be your children's peace. Now, there's a promise for parents. There's a promise for parents.

If you will put up with the Lord's dealing and be faithful to him when he withdraws and his anger is visited on you and instead of quitting or trying to calm the situation or something, if you will go through with God, there's his covenant. That's a covenant with you if you will do that. Great will be the peace of your children.

Audrey and I stand on that. Alright. Your righteousness will be established in righteousness.

Tyranny will be far from you. You'll have nothing to fear. Terror will be removed.

Far removed. See, these things don't come by going to another world. They come through God.

The removal of terror and dread, which makes this world what it is, comes through God. Not through going to another place. It's in God.

If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing. Whoever attacks you will surrender to you. See it as I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals in the flame, forges a weapon fits for its work.

I have created the destroyer to work havoc. That's why God does not want us getting entangled with what's going on in the newspaper. What about this? They stole these secrets.

God does not want us in that. What they do with Kosovo is not our business. Our business is to help people when we can.

But as far as the government, which is really, the present administration is destroying the country. I knew that when, during the first election the Lord told me that. He will do the country much harm.

We see that happening already. That's in the paper. But that is not our battle.

Remember that. Don't get involved in it. That's not where it is with you.

Or me. We are in a different, that comes about because of sin and because they are not seeking the Lord or doing His will. And God does not want us getting in and suffering because the sinners are doing what they are doing.

As I say, if we get a chance to help people, we will help people. But God said it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc. Why is Syria and where is this place where Gaddafi is, Libya, and all these, and North Korea.

Eventually, according to some of the prophets, they will join hands against the United States. And when they do, it will be the Lord. If you read in the Old Testament, you will find whenever Israel sinned, God raised up the other nations and strengthened them.

But what is important for you and me to remember is that we belong to Jesus. That we are not subject to the destroyer. He is not going to destroy us.

It is also to recognize that it is God who creates the destroyer to work havoc. We don't always think of God in that way, but we can't go against the written word. It is God who does the thing.

What good is that? Because eventually we heard today that as a result of this massacre in Columbine, you know what I'm talking about? In the school where all these kids were killed and shot up and everything? I see some of you don't read the paper, you don't know that that happened. You didn't know that? Well, it did happen in a high school called Columbine High School. It's been in the papers for quite a while.

Guess what's happened as a result? Revival has broken out in Columbine. The kids are coming to Jesus. The young people are coming to Jesus.

It took that. Doesn't Satan always overplays his hand? Always overplays his hand. So all is working together for good to those who love God and call the Lord to His purpose.

Everything in the world, everything is working for good. We could wish there were no wars, our economy was perfect, the government was perfect, there's no threat on any hand. You know what happened in America? It would be the most sinful nation on the face of the earth.

If that were true. Because it's trouble that causes people to turn to God. Now, it's too badass to be that way.

It doesn't please the Lord. That's the way it is. So hang loose.

You're going to see judgment on our country like you never thought would be possible. And all the prophets are saying the same thing. But God will protect you if you are abiding in Christ.

If you are abiding in Christ, God will take care of you and your loved ones. I can't say that for all members of the Christian religion by any means. If you're abiding in Christ.

So don't be dismayed of what you see is going to happen in this nation. Don't be dismayed. God has to do it or else destroy us.

Because we are a sinful nation. We're not a Christian nation anymore. Alright, no weapon formed against you will prevail and you will refute every tongue that accuses you.

So you don't have to worry when people begin to gossip and slander you. Don't worry about it. God will justify you.

Just hold your peace and whatever you do, don't try to defend yourself. People say, oh, where there's smoke, there's fire. When you throw a stone over the fence, the dogs get hit, it barks.

When you shake the trees, the nuts fall out. They've got all these kinds of things. So, when evil is spoken of, you don't defend yourself.

Go to the Lord. Say, Lord, if it's true, fix it. If it's not, defend me.

Okay? This is the heritage. No weapon forged against you will prevail. This goes to the barren woman.

No weapon that is forged against you will prevail. This is the blessing for those who are willing to put up with God as He deals endlessly. Yes, Larry? Right.

You will not have a table set before you in the presence of your friends. Okay? Is that right? In the presence of your enemies. That's where the table is set.

Okay? I don't have much longer here. Is there any questions? Okay, you're doing real good. Just hold on for another couple of minutes.

I am the true vine of my Father. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

I wanted to show you another verse that struck me today. It's in the NIV. It's in Hosea 6 verses 1 and 2, I think.

You'll love this. You'll just love this. Okay? Hosea? Hosea? Alright.

Look at that. Look at that. Just cast your eyeballs on that.

Come let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces. Oh joy! Get ready.

But He will heal us. That's the nature of the Christian life. It is constantly being torn to pieces and healed.

He has injured us. I'm going to remind you of where it says for a little bit I hid my face from you. Remember that? It appears in Isaiah 12.

It's the way God works. But notice what He says. He will bind up our wounds.

But God doesn't heal you or bind you up until first He has injured you. So don't be surprised when that happens. Let us acknowledge the Lord.

Let us press on to acknowledge Him. You see that? When you go looking at people and saying it's their fault. If they hadn't have done this and that.

That's not acknowledging the Lord. When you're broken to pieces, acknowledge the Lord. Lord, I'm in pieces.

I've been injured. Don't go blaming people. Acknowledge the Lord.

How does that sound to you? Keep your eyes on God. You're Israel. You're struggling with God.

Not with people. Not with the devil. With God.

He doesn't profit anything struggling with the devil. He can't bless you. As surely as the sun rises, He will appear.

He will come to us like the winter rains. Like the spring rains that water the earth. Now, that's a prophecy, and I want to show it to you.

Then we'll be about through here in a minute. Alright, if you want to look at James 5, verses 7 and 8. It's talking about the spring rains and the planting rains. The winter rains.

The spring rains. He's going to come to us. He will come to us like the rain.

He comes. Jesus comes like the rain. Be patient then, brothers, James 5, 7. Until the Lord's coming, see how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop.

And how patient he is for the autumn. That's the former rain. That comes the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Right after Tabernacles in October. And then, the spring rains. Now, the autumn rain is the book of Acts.

But the book of Acts, if you read the last verse, it isn't finished. You can tell it's not finished. The Acts will resume in the day in which we're living, because we're approaching now the spring rain that will bring the crop to harvest.

And I want to show you the crop, and then we are out of here. And it's in Isaiah 61 verse 11 62 verses 1 and 2, tells you the crop, and why God is so intent on fruit. So intent on fruit.

Alright. For as the soil makes the sprout come up, and a garden causes seeds to grow, Isaiah 61 verse 11, so the sovereign Lord will make two things, two things, spring up before the nations. God wants the nations to see His law brought forth through you.

You are the New Testament counterpart of the tables of stone. That's why, and the fruit is the moral law of God that's being created in you. Which is the image of Christ.

He is the Word made flesh. Now, but you are being made that way for the nations. The reason you're suffering is for the nations.

The reason Christ suffered in Gethsemane was for the world. It wasn't for Himself. The reason God is doing with you is not to make you a spiritual hero, but because He wants people to see Jesus in you.

Okay? Now look at it, see, they didn't, Isaiah didn't write in chapters, Isaiah continues. For Zion's sake, I will not keep silent. For Jerusalem's sake, I will not remain quiet till her righteousness shines out like the dawn.

The world is waiting to see the revealing of the sons of God. That is, the law of God showing through them so they can understand what God expects. The nations will see your righteousness.

You say, well, I don't have any righteousness of my own. True. But you have Christ in you, and that's God's righteousness.

Not imputed to you. Created in you. And all kings, that is, the kings of the earth, will see the glory that will be on you, because the glory comes upon the covenant.

It comes on the moral law of God. God is not interested in glorifying anything except His law. He wants people to understand how to behave, and how to relate to Him.

How to relate to each other. That's of supreme importance. And He found it in Christ, and so He made Him divine.

And so He's grafting us into Christ, so that through us will come some people in the future, and even now can see the law of God. Men may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Now, this is not true of the Christian church in the present hour.

All you see is religion when you see the church. Because it's only had the fall rains, or the winter rains. But the rain that is coming now, the spring rain brings the wheat to maturity in Israel.

It will bring up righteousness to full stature. That's what we're coming into. It's a revival of righteousness.

It will have power, but the main thing God wants is not power. It's righteousness, so that people can see and behave themselves the way they're supposed to. And that's why you were created and brought into the world, ordained from the foundation of the world, and now has come the time when God is going to pour out His rain on His church, so that Christ can come to maturity.

And that's what He's saying to this church right now. It's a new day. I want you to pay attention to what I'm doing in your life.

Because all of us have a lot of leaves on us and stuff that doesn't belong, and I'm going to cut it back, and I'm going to bring forth more of the life of Jesus in you. That's what God is saying to us right now. Let's stand, and let's look to the Lord.

If you are standing here, that's exactly what He's saying to you. I know that. I can feel it.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Oh, blessed is the Lord.

Blessed is the Lord. Blessed is the Lord. Blessed is the Lord.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Oh, God.

Thank You, Lord, for Your goodness. Thank You for Your goodness. Hallelujah, Lord.

Now let Your peace be on each one, Lord, and in their homes. Let it be carried right now. The peace that we're experiencing, Lord, let it be in our homes.

Let it be in our cars. Keep it with us, Lord, that we may bear fruit as we never have. Keep us from the evil one.

We give You thanks, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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