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JANUARY 2016
THE FRUIT OF GRACE part three

Greetings saints!

Our prayer is that every one of you had a blessed Christmas and have had a great start to 2016 already!

INDIA RECAP- CHENNAI

For the past two month's I have been recapping my trip to India from back in October of last year. And this month, I want to conclude with what occurred in my last stop, Chennai.

Those of you who have been following our ministry for some time now are aware that Chennai has been a location that I have visited during all three of my trips to India. And I have to say that it is one of my favorite stops. Over the years, I have made some wonderful friends in the city of Chennai as well as ministry partners who the Lord has put in our path. And it brings me much joy to see these "God connections" every time I go!

My regular stop in Chennai has been at the Charis Bible College, which was the first CBC established in the nation of India. I absolutely love teaching at this school because the students and staff always put such a demand on the anointing and any minister will tell you the same- we love ministering in places that the people put a draw on the Spirit and the Word. And this time was no different!

The Lord led me to minister for 3 hours on the subject of "How to Hear from God" on Monday and then 3 hours on "How to Be Led by the Holy Spirit" on Tuesday. On both days, I experienced such a manifestation of God's grace for ministry because on Monday I felt a little puny due to a cold that was coming against me, yet when I stood up to minister to the students, the grace was there during all three hours! And on Tuesday, I was feeling extremely unprepared to teach on the subject I had on my heart to share yet it came out in such a phenomenal fashion! In my weakness, He is made strong! Amen!

While I was in the city of Chennai, I also had the opportunity to minister in 3 churches- two on my first full day there (Sunday, October 25th) and then at a church near the city of Vellore on my last full day in India (Wednesday, October 28th). And let me tell you- God saved the best for last!

When I took the pulpit on that Wednesday evening, I began by describing to them that when we go see fireworks in the US, there is usually a grand-finale, and so I expected God to save the best for last in that church meeting! And, saints, the Holy Spirit did not disappoint! We had a rip-roaring time talking about the Holy Ghost and our need to drink daily of the new wine!

As a matter of fact, this meeting was being held in a brand new church facility that they had just built by faith. So when I took the pulpit, already being aware of what the Lord wanted me to minister on, I said, "Well, wouldn't it be fitting that the Lord would fill this new wineskin up with new wine tonight!?" Amen! The pastor said, as He was introducing me, that they had received a prophecy that there would be a foreigner who would come share the Word of God to them. Now that might not seem like an odd thing to some of us, but let me assure you, these villages outside of the larger cities in India rarely have foreign visitors- much less, have an American minister in their church. So the pastor told the congregation in Tamil that this evening was a fulfillment to that prophecy! Glory to God!

Saints, the Word was rich that evening and so was the ministry at the end of the service! Demons were cast out (in fact, I have one of these documented on video)! Bodies were healed! And standing at the open doors of the church were Hindu's who had come from the local villages to see what was happening! All glory be to the Father of Lights!

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So this 13 day journey between Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai was exceedingly fruitful! To see the people being healed, delivered and set free was wonderful, but nothing can compare to seeing the light bulbs turn on to the truth of God's Word! I never cease to be amazed at how the Lord speaks truth to His people! It brings tears to my eyes to see the impact His Word and His Spirit has on people.

I look forward to my next trip, but one thing I did learn through this trip was it is not always best to run wide open while you are there. As a wise person once said, "Work smarter, not necessarily harder." That might be a Word for some of you as you head into 2016- it's not just about doing more that makes you fruitful; it is doing what the Lord tells you and leads you to do that makes you fruitful.

There is a prayer the Apostle Paul prayed along these lines in Colossians chapter one...

In Colossians 1:9, Paul began praying for the church of Colosse by asking that they would be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Then in verse 10, he continues by saying, "(so) that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work..."

So I hope you see this... Paul's foundation to this prayer was them being filled with the knowledge of His will. Then he said, "so that we would be fruitful in every good work." Now let me ask you a question: Are you necessarily being fruitful just because you are doing good works? Apparently not, because again Paul prayed that they would be fruitful in every good work- teaching us that you can put your hand to good things and it not be fruitful in the eyes of the Lord. So what makes a good work fruitful? When you are filled with the knowledge of His will and are, therefore, following His plan and pace for your life. Amen!

In other words, if you want to truly be fruitful in the kingdom, you must first be filled with the knowledge of His will and then set your hand to exactly what He wills for you to. To do a bunch of good works- as admirable as that might be- doesn't automatically mean that you are fully pleasing to Him. He is fully pleased when we are doing exactly what His plan is for our lives. Amen to that!

So I encourage you- set aside some time this month to seek the Lord for what He specifically wants you to do with your life. Find out from Him exactly where you are supposed to be and what you are supposed to be doing. The Bible says that when we seek Him with all of our heart, we will find Him. This would be a wise investment of your time.

Well, let's pick up with this month's teaching where we left off last month, shall we?

We have been studying a subject I have entitled "The Fruit of Grace" for the past few months and have learned some pretty fascinating things...

We have learned that Jesus is not just the Author of our faith; we learned that He is also the Finisher of our faith as well- meaning, the good work He started, He will complete it (Philippians 1:6). Therefore, everything in the Christian life is to be received and walked in, the same way we received Jesus in the first place- by grace through faith (Colossians 2:6). Amen! And we learned last month that the vehicle that this is accomplished through is the Holy Spirit and how He is working in us- enabling us to work out our own salvation.

So this life of the kingdom is obviously a grace thing. Everything from the joy of our salvation to the building of God's house is accomplished by grace, not by our self will or self effort. (We are about to camp on this further)

But the particular thing that we have been studying for month's now is joy. And the reason for this is because joy is probably the most sought out thing on the earth. Now people might not say that joy is their one desire, but if you look at everything that most people seek after, it is basically all wrapped up in them being happy.

A FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Now the first and foremost truth that we must understand about joy is that it is a fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:23 describes the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, meekness, and self control. And the primary key to seeing these nine wonderful virtues manifested in our lives is in understanding how fruit is produced and developed in the natural.

You see, fruit is not something that we can produce with just a little effort and self discipline. Fruit cannot be worked for. Likewise, the joy that comes from God must be produced and developed in us by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It must grow from the inside out similarly to how a seed's growth begins underneath the ground and then eventually manifests above the ground.

Saints, this is how the kingdom of God operates.

In Mark 4: 26-29 Jesus gives us one of the most simple, yet profound parables about how the kingdom of God operates. He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately, he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Now it is important to realize that in many of the Lord's parables about the operation of the kingdom of God, the example of seedtime and harvest is used. Why is this so important, you ask? It is because the working of a seed is one of the most mysterious parts of all God's creation. These tiny little objects that we call "seeds" have programmed within themselves the image of whatever they came from. And then, when sown into the ground, they begin to grow through small, systematic stages until they become a reproduction of the plant that they came from. This is a miraculous process and one that mankind has never and will never be able to reproduce.

Well, in this particular parable, Jesus gives insight into how the kingdom of God should operate: a man should scatter seed on the ground and then after that there is no work to be done by him. So while the man just simply rests and goes about his daily duties, the seed begins to sprout and grow on its own. Why? It's because the earth yields crops by itself. But here is what I consider to be the most important phrase in this parable: "he himself does not know how" (verse 27).

You see, when you are living in the kingdom of God and walking in this principle, your testimony will be that of this man in Jesus' parable. You will not be able to explain how you have experienced such a change in your life. You will not be able to put your finger on how you are producing fruit in and through your life. You will not know how it all happened. Much like a seed will produce its fruit simply just by being sown into the ground, that incorruptible seed that was sown in our hearts when we were born again should produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. And this fruit, although oftentimes produced slowly and systematically, will become manifested in our lives and we will not be able to explain it. It will just happen; and here is the key point: it will just happen by grace.

And joy is no different. All of the fruit of the Spirit is supposed to be produced in our lives by the grace of God and in turn spring up in our outward man. The joy of the Lord was planted in our spirits the moment we were born again and the Christian life is simply a process of letting that joy affect our soul and our body.

GOD GIVES THE INCREASE

And again, this goes back to the Apostle Paul's point in Philippians 1:6 when he said that the good work He

began in us He will complete. Paul did not say that the good work the Lord began we will complete it. No, he said that God will finish what He started- not with any of our help nor with the help of anyone else. God is working in us and He alone will increase the fruits of our righteousness. Praise the Lord!

So just as a branch cannot boast, saying that it produced its fruit through its own hard work or wisdom, likewise we cannot take credit for any true spiritual fruit that is produced in our lives. The true fruit that remains comes only through a supernatural influence that cannot be counterfeited or reproduced- and that influence is God Himself. The Author of life Himself grants us the grace necessary to produce fruit for Himself! Amen! That is a good deal, isn't it?

The Apostle Paul also made this point in 1 Corinthians chapter 3.

In verses 6-7, Paul was giving the Corinthian church a similar lesson that he did in Philippians 2:12-13- that we do not need to focus on man as being our source of spiritual production, for it is God who works in us. He said in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7- "God gives the increase." So it is not he that plants the seed (i.e. Paul) and it is not he that waters the seed (i.e. Apollos), but it is God who gives the harvest of fruit in our lives.

Again, we see that true spiritual production comes as a result of God's grace in our lives. Just as we were not born again by our natural lineage, the will of the flesh, the will of man (see John 1:13), likewise we are not going to see increase in our lives through any of these natural mediums either. God alone can and will give us the harvest of fruit that we desire, and this includes the fruit of joy as well.

THE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

So how is God going to give the increase and cause us to tap into this grace that produces fruit? And then, what will this fruitfulness result in?

The answer to both of these questions is found in Philippians 1:11.

As was his custom in most of his letters, the Apostle Paul prayed for the church he was writing to. And in Philippians 1:9-11, we have his prayer for the church of Philippi. There are many wonderful truths in his prayer, but I want to draw your attention to verse 11 where Paul said, "... being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

In verse 11, the truth in this prayer is very significant because it reveals to us both how this grace is tapped into and what the end result of this work of grace will be.

First of all, Paul was praying for these saints to be filled with the fruits of righteousness.

The picture he was painting was that of a tree that is full of fruit. We have all seen certain trees that have no fruit, others that have some fruit, and then others that are full of fruit. God wants our limbs to be full of the fruits of righteousness. In other words, the Lord expects a harvest of righteousness to be produced in and through our lives from the seed of righteousness that He freely gave us when we were born again. And the fruit of the Spirit is an inescapable fruit of our righteousness. Therefore, joy is one of these fruits of righteousness that Paul was speaking of here.

ABIDING IN THE VINE

Now notice what Paul said that these fruits of righteousness come as a result of- "...which are by Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:11).

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You see, true spiritual fruit is always a product of abiding in the True Vine. Therefore, the fruit of the Spirit, such as joy, is a product of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ since it is the Vine which supports and provides for the branches. This is how we must view joy: It is produced in our lives by grace and cannot be produced apart from Jesus (John 15:5).

In John chapter 15 we have Jesus' teaching on the True Vine and its branches. This teaching is so simple, yet so many fail to walk in the truth thereof.

Jesus, of course, is the True Vine and we are the branches. Now the main point of this parable is that we, as the branches, must "abide" in the Vine if we are going to bear its fruit. Apart from the Vine, we can produce nothing.

Now the word "abide" in this parable is crucial to understanding its meaning. It comes from the Greek word "meno" which means to stay, remain, dwell, or live. So when Jesus spoke of abiding in Him- the True Vine- He was referring to "remaining" in Him. In other words, abiding in Him is staying attached to Him.

Did you know that this is exactly how any branch is going to produce fruit? It must remain in its vine. If it does not stay connected to its source of life, it will never be able to produce its fruit. You have never seen a branch severed from its vine continuing to produce fruit, have you? In fact, the only way you have ever seen a fruit-bearing branch that was unattached from its vine was if it had just recently been detached. Why is this? It is because the vine is the life source of every branch. It was before every branch and every branch originated from the vine. Not only had every branch come from the vine, but every branch continues to be supported and alive through its relationship with the vine.

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning the creation and it's Creator.

A branch that stays close and attached to its vine will bear much fruit, but the branch that becomes detached will not only fail to bear fruit, but will eventually dry up and die.

Therefore, the fruit of the Spirit is going to be produced in our life as we stay close and attached to the Lord Jesus. But this is not a quick process either. As with any type of vegetation, there is a slow, methodical process to fruit-bearing- first the blade, then the head, and then the full grain in the head (Mark 4:28). This is how we must see the progress of the Christian life. Fruit is always born with patience (see Luke 8:15).

This fruit comes as we stay close to the Lord through our communion with Him. This is because our fellowship with Christ is the foundation on which we build a successful Christian life. We must stay united together with Him if we are going to bear His fruit because as the Master taught us- "no Christ" equals "no fruit" (John 15:5).

So if we want to see a harvest of joy in our lives, we must learn to abide in the Lord Jesus as well. For He is the only way to having our joy filled and then it staying full. Again, it is all by grace, and Jesus who is full of grace is the only means by which we can experience this fullness of joy.

THE RECYCLED SEED

Now I just love what the Apostle Paul went on to say next in his prayer for the church of Philippi...

When we begin to see this increase of fruit in our lives solely by the grace of God, there is only one response: It is praise and glory being given to the One who gave the increase!

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Notice what Paul said next in Philippians 1:11- "...to the glory and praise of God." The word "to" in this verse comes from the Greek prefix "eis." This little word denotes "to come into something" or "resulting in." In other words, Paul was saying that the result of our lives being filled with the fruits of our righteousness by the grace of God is "to the glory and praise of God."

Therefore, when this increase that we had no part in producing occurs, there is only one reasonable response. There will be no room for boasting or for receiving any praise & glory. There will only be room for glory and praise being given to God- mainly because we will be so thankful that our heart's desire for fruit is fulfilled and we had no part in its manifestation. Therefore, thanksgiving, praise and worship will just overflow out of our hearts in response to the grace of God.

And do you know what this in turn does? It restarts this whole process! Glory to God!

You know, a wonderful part of the whole cycle of seedtime and harvest is that when a seed springs up and produces its fruit, the fruit that it produces contains more seed in itself! Therefore, that one seed will not only produce what it is programmed to produce- whether that be leaves, vegetation, fruit, etc. But it will also produce more seed at the same time! This, of course, is meant to restart the whole process and seedtime and harvest.

So when the seed within us brings forth its fruit by God's grace, our response should be to praise God for it. And then when the mouth begins to speak out of the abundance of thanksgiving and praise that is in the heart, it will put more seed in the ground of our heart and restart the whole process! Praise God!

This is the importance of first receiving the grace of God and then verbally expressing our gratitude. It is the key to unlocking a continuous cycle of God's grace in our lives. Amen!?!

So know that the joy of the Lord is a fruit, not a formula. It will only be consistently tasted by learning to live in the kingdom of God. Jesus is the source of all joy and this joy of the Lord is only walked in by God's grace and through our faith. Amen!

And what makes this gospel even "gooder" is that it is an unending process! God begins the good work in our lives. Then He completes it all by Himself. And then this cycle of grace is keeps on recycling! Amen! Glory to God!

Let's, you and I, get on this train of fruit-bearing together! Let's tap into this principle of the kingdom and become branches that are full of fruit! Amen?

Until next month... Maranatha!

Victoriously,

