



# Gospel / Life

## Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

### **Study 9: Freed From Futility Into Fruitfulness**

#### **Meditation on Psalm 1**

Blessed is the man  
who does not  
    **walk** in the *counsel* of the wicked or  
    **stand** in the *way* of sinners or  
    **sit** in the *seat* of mockers.

But his **delight** is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he **meditates** day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
    which yields its fruit in season  
    and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked!  
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Therefore  
    the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
    nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,  
    but the way of the wicked will perish.

*Striking images throughout the psalm invite us and enable us to meditate. Images are for the imagination and the imagination is fuelled by more than our intellect; our emotions are also brought into play. All kinds of feelings may surface in meditation, often feelings we may have suppressed as being "not very Christian"! In meditation we are drawn to be honest before God our Father and before ourselves. We let the word of God speak into us, addressing us as we really are, not just as we think we should be*

## **Praying For Much Fruit**

Psalm 119 begins with a very similar tone to Psalm 1:

Blessed are they whose ways are blameless,  
who walk according to the law of the LORD.  
Blessed are they who keep His statutes  
and seek Him with all their heart.  
They do nothing wrong; they walk in His ways.

But as David writes this psalm, he writes, not as one who has “made it” with regard to this blessed way, but rather as one who is seeking. The whole of this longest Psalm is a prayer to be in the company of these people, as we see as this first stanza goes on:

You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.  
Oh!, that my ways were steadfast in obeying Your decrees.  
Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all Your commands.  
I will praise You with an upright heart as I learn Your righteous laws.  
I will obey Your decrees; do not forsake me utterly.

As Psalm 119 goes on, the prayer to the Lord throughout is “Teach me... open my eyes... let me understand... strengthen me... direct me... turn my heart...” These prayers are matched with prayers that the Lord be gracious, and save from sin, worthless things, enemies and death.

It is a wonderful Psalm to pray. In helping us to meditate on the law of the Lord—the glories and joys and wonders of that law—it is opening for us the way of fruitfulness in our lives. We are taught by the psalm to pray that we will be like trees planted by streams of water, shady and leafy, and abundant in fruit.

Such a prayer is for us who are in Christ a prayer for the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who brings about the harvest of fruit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-26), and it is the Holy Spirit who writes the law of God into our hearts (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26-27). Whenever we ask God our Father to bless us, this is precisely what we are asking for above all things.

Anglican gathered worship has a very good prayer used at the start: it is a prayer I use often to start the day of my personal worship and service:

Almighty God,  
To whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by inspiration of Your Holy Spirit,  
That we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your holy name;  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Appointed For Much Fruit**

In John 15, on the night of his betrayal Jesus spoke to his disciples about their fruitfulness:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. (John 15:16)

It is the purpose of God in Jesus Christ that we be fruitful. Jesus called us for this, and more than that he appointed us (=set us up) for this. From the very beginning, the purpose of God for humanity was fruitfulness, but this fruitfulness was not simply *demand*ed; it was *given* by God in blessing (Gen. 1:28ff). Fruitfulness is linked to having children, filling and subduing the earth, and ruling over the living elements of creation. That is, fruitfulness is not only about being fecund, but about fulfilling our role as God’s co-workers in bringing creation to its great goal under God.

When the man and the woman sinned at the beginning, fruitfulness was lost. The blessing of God was still present in some measure: they could still have children and they could still fill up the earth. But the participation of joy in the eternal plans of God was removed. In fact, human beings have pursued their own plans and purposes from that time on. And what the Word of God tells us, and what history shows to eyes of faith, is that God frustrates the plans of wicked. All that we seek to accomplish comes to nought, and ends in dust and ashes.

The couple found themselves in a world in which not only was there blessing but also curse. That curse served the purpose of God—it put a restraint on the ferocious independence of humanity, limits on all that independent humanity could achieve. It stopped us cursing the whole world with our dominating evil. Essentially that curse was that of futility. Not even creation could reach its goal. “Creation was subjected to futility, not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:20-21).” The futility and frustration was imposed by God the faithful Creator, for He did so in hope of the final liberation. He knew how to renew humanity and creation into the way of fruitfulness.

Psalm 1 told us that the way of this fruitfulness is in careful listening to the law and ways of God, and diligence in obeying those ways. But if we have (and we have!) failed to delight in God’s law and rather have walked, stood and sat in all the wrong places, what possibility of fruitfulness will there be for us, if any? Is God’s creational purpose for us lost forever? Jesus is saying in John 15, that the work of God that he has come to accomplish is to restore us, who have not listened to God’s word nor followed in His way, to fruitfulness. That is why he came: to rescue us from futility into fruitfulness. He says,

I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. 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.  
(John 15:1-2)

God the Father worked on us in the body of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was a vine with many branches: he identified himself with the whole “vine” of the human race. In his body the fruitlessness of the human race, of every person was going to receive all that was due to it. Every fruitless branch was going to be cut out. Every branch that does bear fruit was going to be pruned for further fruitfulness. Remember that Jesus was speaking these words on the night of his betrayal, just before he went to the cross. He was saying that in the cross, as he bore the sins of the world, God would act to deliver us from fruitlessness and into fruitfulness. The bad branches cut out of the vine are us and our sins—Jesus bore the judgment due us all. The fruitful branch that was pruned was Jesus himself, and all those who hold to him by faith and all that they do as they hold to Christ in faith.

Fruitfulness would come only as we remain joined to the true vine. To “remain” or “abide” in Christ means to continue to hold to him as the source of forgiveness, goodness and righteousness. By remaining in the vine, remaining in Christ, we acknowledge that it is the vital, life-giving flow from him to us that produces fruit in us. In union with him, fruitfulness comes; without him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Jesus spoke about our union with him, and said that as we live in and hold fast to that union, we can ask whatever we wish and it would be granted to us (15:7). The answered prayer and the bearing of fruit are linked (see 15:8.) The prayer then must

be very similar to the prayer of Psalm 119—that all of God’s gracious and saving dealings with us in Christ will result in us living in obedience to Him and His purposes (see 15:9-14). Our prayer, which the Father is so glad to answer, is really something like:

Dear Father, your Son Jesus Christ has borne our sins in his body on the tree and cleansed us from all wickedness. He has delivered us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Beloved Son. As we live in him, believing in him and trusting that we are accepted by You entirely and only because of him, please fill us with his fruitfulness. Enable us to walk in his goodness, holiness, and righteousness. So we pray You to fill us with Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Having been delivered from darkness to light, brought from under the curse into the whole blessing of God, we are exhorted then to give full expression to fruitfulness that is ours in Christ:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)\_and find out what pleases the Lord.\_Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.\_For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. (Eph. 5:8-12)

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.\_They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:17-24)

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully\_giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:10-14)