

## **Manifested Fruits of Faith**

Do apple trees need to be told how to bear apples? Do they need to be **commanded** to bear apples (and not oranges or figs or thorns/thistles)? **Of course not!** Good and healthy apple trees bear good apples. That's just what they do. What about Christians? What about those of us who've been grafted into the vine of Life that is Christ Jesus? Do we need to be **told/commanded** to bear good and God-pleasing fruits? Well... based on the words of our Lord in the Gospel lesson for today, **it seems that we do.** In fact, Jesus gives a rather long laundry list of imperatives (commands). We are **commanded** to: love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless/praise those who curse us, pray for those who abuse us; who make accusations against us. If someone strikes us on our cheek, we are to offer them the other cheek as well. If someone robs us of our cloak, we offer to them our tunic too. We are to give to everyone who begs from us, and if anyone steals from us, we're not to demand our goods back from them. That sounds so crazy in our day and age in which we're so quick to file suit against anyone who has "wronged" us, especially if it pertains to our property or our money. Nope, says Jesus. Let 'em keep it. If you want others to treat you well, then you are to treat them well first. **I don't know about you, but I'm not looking so good right now!** In fact, to use the language we heard Jesus use last week (which is part of this same discussion, and which immediately precedes these words we hear today), "**Woe is me!**" My actions are a dead-ringer for somebody not acting like they're so blessed in Christ.

And before anyone tries to find loopholes they can squeeze through in an attempt to come out in a favorable light, Jesus reminds us that you don't do these sorts of things to only certain people or "the right people," you know... your friends and the people you like. That's easy, yes, but if you only love those who love you, so what? Even rank sinners do that. If you do good only for people who do good to you, so what? Even the foulest of sinners do that. That's nothing more than a *quid pro quo* business transaction. Reciprocity. You get me a present, so now I have to get you a present. You did me a favor, so now I'll do you a favor so that we're even. **Yeah... can you feel the love?** If you lend to someone who's hurting or in a pinch only because you expect to be repaid in full, so what? What credit is that to you? It's not like you're this great benevolent philanthropist. **Even rank pagans lend to fellow rank pagans, fully expecting to get back the same amount.** In fact, even if we don't charge interest in terms of dollars and cents, there's ALWAYS a price to pay, isn't there? There's an old adage that states: "**There is nothing more expensive than a free gift.**" **Boy, ain't that the truth!** They're always reminding you of the "free gift" they gave you. It's free—technically—but you always seem to be in hock to them, right? Sinners act this way. Self-serving glory hounds looking for accolades and praise act this way. The

big question is: Would you do any of this—love, freely give (not merely lend), do good, pray for, praise, bless—**for someone who absolutely didn't deserve it?** In fact, that's not even the question. It's the command. "*I say to you....*"

Okay... so now we've got a problem; **a BIG problem.** We're not saved because of our works, right? St. Paul is very clear (in multiple epistles). "*We are saved through faith by grace, and not by works, lest anyone should boast*" (Eph 2:8-9). "*By works of the Law no one will be justified*" (Gal 2:16). "*By works of the Law no human being will be justified in His sight*" (Rom 3:20). Think on that. We could do all kinds of good works, and even do them "perfectly" (which is impossible), **and yet none of it would cover the wage of even one single sin, let alone a lifetime's worth of them.** All our good works, even lumped together into one giant communal account, would still not atone for **one single sin.** God **has never and will never** justify anyone simply because of the good works they do. In terms of salvation, "*our works avail us not.*" **And yet... Jesus is clearly commanding good works here! What are we to make of this?**

Well... believe it or not, but this is actually quite simple to reconcile and make sense of. Remember: Jesus is speaking to His disciples. He's not preaching to a bunch of unconverted unbelievers. He's speaking to all those who **already** confess their sins and hold fast to Him in repentant faith. **They already know and believe that He is their Savior.** They're not trying to earn their salvation. They know and confess and hold fast in faith (alone) to the fact that **Jesus is their salvation!** I said it last week, and I'll say it again: Jesus isn't giving these folks prescriptions for salvation. Rather, He's giving description. He's describing what the sanctified life looks like and sounds like in "everyday action." Christians don't just talk the talk. They actually walk the walk!

We can easily understand these commands the same way we understand the 10 Commandments (which are actually translated in the original Hebrew as "the Ten Statements/Words"). When you are a faithful child of God, you will be doing these things, and you won't be doing these sinful things. That's just what faithful children of God do! Faithful children of God have no other gods. They don't misuse God's name. They honor His Sabbath by keeping it holy. When you're a faithful child of God, you won't be murdering or lusting or impure in your thoughts/deeds. You won't be stealing or scheming to get somebody else's stuff. Faithful children of God always strive to put the best construction on things. They don't slander or make accusation, especially when all the facts aren't known, and especially when they consider the sinful skeletons in their own closets. Faithful children of God don't covet. They simply trust in God to provide them with all they need for this body and life. They're thankful and content with His providence.

Well... the same goes here. It's not prescription, but description. Faithful children of God will be loving their enemies. That's just what those who are blessed and faithful children of God do. Regardless of what may be happening in their lives, they will be trusting in God always, trusting that He is working all things for their good and for the good of all those who love Him. The faithful child of God will be content with and thankful for their (undeserved) daily bread. That's just what blessed and faithful children of God do. They will be giving freely of all that they have all that they are, expecting **NOTHING** in return... not even a thank-you note or a pat on the back. They will turn the other cheek when wronged or abused. Unless it's false doctrine/practice, it's just not a hill to die on! Faithful children of God aren't willing to split the Body of Christ over stupid, petty things. In fact, it's just the opposite. They're merciful, just as their heavenly Father is merciful with/to them. They do good even to those who hate them. That's just what faithful children of God, who are called blessed by God purely because of His grace on account of Jesus Christ, do.

Like I said earlier, I don't know about you, but I'm not looking so good right now. In fact, recognized in the Light of God's Truth, I know my sinful reality. I'm not a *perfect* child of God. I'm not a very faithful child of God. I don't act so blessed. Not even close. I'm certainly not God's gift to the Church. I'm a sinner who deserves nothing but present and eternal punishment. But... I'm a sinner that God loved so much that He willingly gave His only-begotten Son to suffer His just and righteous wrath against my sin and pay that wage with His own innocent life. The same goes for you and for all the children of Adam. God so loved the *whole world*.... This is the sole fount and source of our salvation—the mercy, grace, and love of God in the flesh; the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

Folks: This is why our Lord speaks in such a way in our lesson for today. He's not issuing commands that *you need to do in order to be saved*. That simply can never be. You can't save yourself, no matter how hard you try or how good your intentions may be. He is, however, proclaiming the Truth of the perfect demands of God's Law. He proclaims this Truth to us, not to condemn us in wrath, but to call us in love to repentance. *The truth is we do need to be reminded from time to time (all the time, actually) that "this isn't how faithful children of God behave."* He proclaims this Truth to us so that, through faith, we confess and repent of our sins. Faithful children of God don't make excuses for their sins, and they certainly aren't content with remaining in their sins. Quite the contrary actually. They're truly sorrowful over their sin. It's not just lip-service or an act. They truly desire to turn away from their sin. It's precisely because God loves us that He tells us the Truth of our sins and the Truth of the wage for that sin because this divine Truth—this reality check on the perfect demands of God's righteous Law— *necessarily directs us to Him who has already paid that wage in full with His perfect life, death, and resurrection.*

Through faith (wrought by the Holy Spirit Himself), repentant and thankful children of God understand oall that God has so richly done for them, purely out of His mercy and grace; purely out of an incomprehensible love for them. Consider your own baptism. Consider this holy supper your Lord is about to nourish you with—His own Body and Blood, for the forgiveness of all your sins; for the peace that surpasses all understanding. Look around! You are blessed indeed; blessed beyond all understanding. Even though this shadowy vale of tears seems to be getting darker and scarier with every passing day, you are blessed beyond all measure because you belong to Christ, and nothing and no one can ever take that from you. This is not prescription. **This is description.** You don't *need to become* blessed. You **are** blessed, purely on account of God's grace, in Christ and through Christ. This is how God sees it. This is how God describes your reality. "*I have called you by name. You belong to Me.*" It doesn't get any more blessed than this, and this is your reality right now, and will be for all eternity!

*So... how does faith respond to these gifts of joy and peace and blessedness? What do faithful children of God do in response to all these gifts of God?* Simple. They bear good fruits. May all your words and deeds—all your fruits—be in keeping with repentance and be good and God-pleasing in His sight, from this time forth and forevermore, obviously not in an attempt to merit His good gifts, but in thankful response for these blessed gifts. ***That's just how faith responds. That's just what faithful children of God do.*** May your entire life be a giant billboard—a giant proclamation—of God's mercy, grace, and love for you, not because of who you are or what you do, but because of who He is and because of all that Christ Jesus has done for you in His all-atoning life, death, and resurrection and all that He continues to do for you in/through His very present and unconditional means of grace. I guess the only real question is: ***Knowing what you already know, how could you not bear good and God-pleasing fruits? That's just what good fruits trees do, right?***

To Him be all the glory, praise, and honor... **AMEN.**