

Branching out

When we read the prophet Zechariah, he draws our attention to a man whose name is Branch. He will branch out, or sprout, from where He is and build the temple of the Lord. The symbolism of this statement is paramount. Jeremiah said, 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth', or literally to 'branch out'. King David spoke similarly concerning his house being ordered in all things and secured, 'For all my salvation and all my desire, will He not indeed make it grow', or 'branch out'?

When Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he expressed his desire to come among them and find fruit. It is most certainly our desire to see every local church branching out. The symbolism of the lampstand with its branches is numerically symbolic. It is not as though a local church is made up of nine pieces only. The symbolism being conveyed to us is that of fruitfulness. When a lampstand local church is branching out, it is doing so because the cup has brought forth the bulb, and the bulb has brought forth the flower.

We might say allegorically that the house of Stephanas was the first cup, bulb and flower in the region of Achaia. He is referred to by Paul as the 'firstfruits'. We don't need to lean too heavily on the symbolism here, but it is evident that this household was bearing the fruit of the word. And this is the 'fruit of light' as Paul called it. Perhaps we might say then, that the house of Fortunatus is the second cluster of fruitfulness, and likewise, the household of Achaicus is the third cluster of cup, bulb and flower.

References:

Zech 6:12 Jer 33:15
2 Sam 23:5 Rom 1:13.
1 Cor 16:17

Further Study

1 Cor 16

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 10

Firstfruits in Asia

We don't know much about the man referred to as the firstfruits in Asia, except that he is called Epaenetus. Writing to the Colossian church, which was in the region of Asia, Paul spoke of 'the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world'. And he continued, 'It is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also, since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth'.

It is a remarkable thought that Colossae, along with the seven churches referred to in the book of Revelation, were all from the region in Asia. We can be certain that Epaenetus was the first cup, bulb and flower. He was indeed the firstfruits of that region. We can also assume that he was the head of a worthy house which had received the word of the messenger in whatever place he was living at the time. It is appropriate to assume that the same character and standing of Stephanas was also in the house of Epaenetus.

James spoke of 'the seed whose fruit is righteousness, sown in peace by those who make peace'. We immediately think of a son of peace who receives the messenger and his message. The word of the Lord comes to us as seed to the sower and bread to the eater. There can be no doubt that firstfruits people are the fruit of the word which came to them but they are also the seed that is sown. This reminds us of the crisis in Jerusalem in the early church when Stephen was stoned. The Scripture accounts that they were all scattered, except the twelve.

References:

Col 1:5-6 James 3:18
Luke 10:6 2 Cor 9:10
Isa 55:10 Acts 8:1

Further Study

Col 1

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 11

Sown as seed

When the first great persecution touched the early church, the Scripture says that all the disciples were scattered except the twelve apostles. The meaning of this word is quite simple, and there is no negative connotation at all, even though the circumstances were quite severe. As the believers were scattered into all the surrounding regions they were, in fact, being sown as seed. The book of Acts accounts that some went 'proclaiming' the gospel and others simply went forth 'talking'. This is the effect of seventy being sent forth. We must remember that we are not referring to a literal number, except on a few occurrences like when Jesus sent out the seventy disciples and the household of Jacob went down into Egypt as 'seventy in number'. The Scripture accounts that the more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more they grew and multiplied. This is the principle of seventy. It is the number of multiplication.

When Israel came up out of Egypt, they did so as a great multitude. Likewise, when the early disciples were scattered from Jerusalem, they began to increase as the fruit from the seed of the word. The initial excitement which captivated the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus, and likewise, the remarkable experience of receiving the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, gave way to acute trauma. This persecution would have initially made no sense at all to the disciples. But as the early church endured these persecutions, the 'word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied'. Paul exhorted the Colossians to 'walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God'.

References:

James 3:18 Acts 8:1-5
Ex 1:5, 12 Acts 12:24
Col 1:10

Further Study

Ex 1

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 12

Bearing fruit

Paul wrote to the Romans saying that he had often planned to come to them so that he could obtain some fruit among them, 'even as among the rest of the Gentiles'. In the last chapter of this same book, Paul spoke of putting his seal upon this fruit of theirs. We know that this is the fruit of the Spirit at both a personal and corporate level. This fruit of the Spirit is to become an individual possession. It is the character of Christ brought forth by the Holy Spirit in our lives. And He is sanctifying us to this. However, it is also the fruit of our corporate life in a lampstand local church. No one lights a lamp unless they put it upon a lampstand.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit among us to sanctify us so that we might become a branch of the lampstand in our local community. And the purpose of this is to set a lamp upon each branch of the lampstand. Hence, he said to the Ephesians, 'You are light in the Lord; walk as children of light, for the fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth'. We might suggest that this is another meaning of the cluster of cup, bulb and flower in a lampstand. When goodness, righteousness, and truth are manifest, a worthy house is evident. And when the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is apparent house to house, we have the beginning of a branch.

Jesus said that we did not choose Him, but He chose us and appointed us. He has laid the word down to us so that we go and bear fruit. But more than this, He desires that our fruit should remain. In this respect, a local church is the evidence of viable and sustainable fruit.

References:

Rom 1:13 Rom 15:28
Gal 5:22 Matt 5:15
Mark 4:21 Eph 5:8-9
John 15:16

Further Study

Eph 5

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 13

A branch of the vine

Let us consider the branch from another perspective. Jesus said, 'I am the vine, you are the branches'. However, He spoke of the Father as the vinedresser. The Father is adjusting us as sons according to our fruitfulness. In the negative sense, He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit. But every branch that bears fruit, He prunes and cleanses it so that it bears more fruit. It does not escape our attention that Jesus also said the disciples were already clean or pruned because of the word. In the original language, pruning and cleansing are the same. When He prunes us, He cleanses us. Alternatively, when He cleanses us, He is pruning us.

We must not be surprised by the experience of pruning. It is the evidence that we have brought forth fruit and that another season of fruitfulness is ahead of us. The fact that we are branches in the vine, teaches us that we are the bearers of the fruit. However, the source of our life is in the vine itself. Consequently, Jesus said, 'If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered'. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine.

In this vein, Paul constantly spoke of us being 'in Christ', and by this he meant abiding together in the body of Christ, the church. There is a crisis of not abiding and remaining in the vine. Firstly, we cannot bear fruit. And if, season after season, we bear no fruit because of an independent attitude, the Father Himself will take the initiative as the vinedresser to take us away. Every local church must abide in the fellowship of the lampstand. It must abide in the vine, that is, 'in Christ'.

References:

John 15:1-6
Col 1:24
Eph 2:4-7, 10-13

Further Study

John 15

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 14