God's Shocking Declaration

What Would You Like God To Say to You?

Years ago my sister-in-law asked me to officiate at her wedding. That meant giving a wedding sermon and I was quite nervous about doing that. I had only preached a few times up to then. My first sermon lasted only five minutes, and the second sermon was much worse as, I overcompensated and preached nearly fifty minutes that time. I had never officiated at a wedding and so it was nerve-wracking trying to figure out what to do. The groom's parents were quite wealthy, and the wedding was held at their lavish mansion. His father was a famous lawyer in New Orleans, and his list of clients was a who's who of Louisiana society. To my great shock one of the guests at the wedding was the second or third most famous TV evangelist in the world. After the wedding, several guests thanked me for my comments and one even told me that my preaching reminded her of Chuck Swindoll, one of the most famous preachers on the radio at the time. I don't think she was giving me a word from God as to how my ministry would go because it certainly was not prophetic, but it was very kind of her to say what she did. Words impact our lives. A teacher who tells her student she is very smart impacts that child. A husband tells his wife she is beautiful impacts the wife. A grandparent who tells his grandson he is proud of him impacts the grandson. A business owner who tells her employee she is grateful for his hard work impacts the employee. Words can have a dramatic effect on our lives, especially if we respect the one speaking. Jesus made a shocking declaration and if you take it seriously, His words can dramatically upgrade the quality of your life. Our big idea comes from what Jesus said. Above all else, stay attached to Jesus.

As Jesus was making His final comments to His disciples before He was arrested, He told them something that is astounding. **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."** (John 15: 5 NIV) The metaphor of the vine is frequently found in the Old Testament. Nearly always it is symbolic of the people of Israel. But in Isaiah 11: 1, it represents something completely different. The vine is the Messiah. **A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him —the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord —** (Isaiah 11:1-2 NIV) The prophet Isaiah had a unique way of taking the cards of previous prophecies and reshuffling the deck and presenting a word from the Lord never heard before by God's people. If you want to know exactly what the Gospel is and how to understand what God did through His Son Jesus, don't first go to Matthew, Mark, Luke or John; start with Isaiah 53. It is spelled out there with clarity in such a way that you can fully see what salvation is and how it came to you. When Jesus said He is the vine, He took what Isaiah spoke of 800 years before and gave you a clear understanding of life for you when you fully embrace salvation. He states that if you stay attached to Him, your source of life, you will bear much fruit or a great abundance of fruit. It is not a possibility that you will bear much fruit; it is a guarantee. But only is it possible if you remain attached to the vine.

But what is this fruit He is promising for you? Many misconstrue this prophecy as an assurance of success. Countless numbers of Christian groups have misrepresented the guarantee here. Fruit-bearing, from God's perspective is not getting a high score on a test or running a profitable business or making a name for yourself as a YouTube star. Fruit is precisely what the Bible says it is. Paul spells it out for you in his letter to the Galatians. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.** (Galatians 5: 22-23 NIV) None of this has to do with what you accomplish or how well you get your job done or your importance to others. It is strictly a recalibration of your personality. As we get older, we realize just how important these qualities are. Without love or joy in your life, what good is it really to be the richest person in the world? Without peace or self-control, what kind of a life will you have, even if you are the most famous movie star in your era? This is the pinnacle of success, having faithfulness in you, goodness and gentleness defining you. Why did Solomon famously state again and again that all he accomplished in life was useless to him? He called it futile. **In my opinion, nothing is worthwhile; everything is futile. For what does a man get for all his hard work?** (Ecclesiastes 1: 2-3 TLB) It is because the inner qualities that make life good and worthwhile he lacked. He was smart and accomplished and powerful and all his lusts he could feed but a good life he lacked. And he decided his life was meaningless.

The Apostle Paul once said something that has shaken my view of life. He noted rather casually, **I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every**

situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Philippians 4: 12 NIV) Imagine that! I wonder what Solomon would have paid to have Paul's state of mind. What would Marilyn Monroe or Elvis have paid to have that inner world? And when we consider how many horrible things Paul suffered including being beaten nearly to death, imprisoned falsely numerous times and being shipwrecked and going without food and sleep time and again, it seems astounding what Paul possessed. He was content no matter what his circumstances were and it was not something he achieved, it was something given him by God. Of all the treasures he could have gained, I can't imagine Paul would have traded his contentment for any of them.

Jesus said you will bear much fruit, abundant fruit if you do just one thing. You stay attached to Him, or as the NIV puts it, you remain in Him. It is obvious that branches do not bear fruit if they are not attached to the trunk of the tree or the stem of the plant or the vine. They will whither and die but not bear any fruit. There are only two ways of life. You either remain connected to Jesus and all He has to pour into you or you are disconnected from Him and you are in the process of shriveling up and dying. There are not any other options. If you remain attached to Christ, then all the tremendous qualities of the inner world of Jesus are yours. You see, Christ does not just give you a set of chores to do to gain peace, patience, kindness or any of the rest of the fruit of the Spirit. They come naturally because they are what make up the personality of Christ and like a vine simply passes along to the branches what it has, so too Jesus puts in you what He has when you are attached to Him. You have to be psychotic or thoroughly cut yourself off from God not to want love, joy, peace or any of the other qualities that Christ has for you. And you do not have to possess the right psychological makeup or genetic qualities or family history to gain them. You simply have to remain in Christ

But how do you remain in Christ, how do you stay attached to the vine which is God? Jesus makes it pretty clear. First, you need to do what He says to do. **If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.** (John 15: 10 NIV) That is pretty simple. Just do what God tells you to do and automatically the fruit of the Spirt will make their way into your personality. We could spend all day talking about what Jesus says to do but suffice it to say that it is pretty clear every time. The Sermon on the Mount spells out the roadmap for gaining more peace and joy and patience. So do the Ten Commandments. There are some commands that eliminate the barriers to having the fruit of the Spirit developing in you. Greed is one of the most powerful hindrances to peace and patience and self-control and even faithfulness. Consider this clear strategy found in Malachi for breaking up greed in you. **Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.** (Malachi 3: 10 NIV)

A second way you stay attached to Jesus is by connecting your thoughts to God's thoughts through prayer. Jesus tells you to pray to Him for every big or small matter that comes to your mind. **If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.** (John 15 :7-8 NIV) Contrary to popular belief, Jesus wants you to ask again and again for what you want. In fact, this is rendered in the Bible as a command. Jesus orders you to ask and ask and ask in prayer for what you want. The more you ask, the closer you get to God. Don't worry that you ask amiss, or you ask with wrong motives. God will correct those errors in you and as you become more and more used to praying about everything, you will grow closer and closer to Jesus and become skilled at praying for what He is happy to give you.

The third way to stay attached to Jesus is by loving those He puts in your life. **My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.** (John 15: 12 NIV) There are no qualifiers put on this. It is not love those who remember your birthday or love those who are nice to you or who respect you or make you feel good about yourself. You are told to love each person who comes your way regardless of the sorts of people they are. Of course, if you aren't interested in the fruit of the Spirit or being attached to Jesus in a strong and fulfilling love relationship, then pick and choose who you will love based on how you feel about them. However, if you want those spectacular qualities only those who are connected firmly to Jesus develop, then you love everyone you come across. Our big idea has been at the center of this entire message. Above all else, stay attached to Jesus. Grow as close to Jesus as possible so you can have as wonderful a life as you can have when the fruit of the Spirit make up your personality.