

## God Promises To Help Us Bear Fruit

Hebrews 13:20-21, New Year's Day

January 1, 2010

Beloved of the Lord....As we look upon the past year 2009, it's very easy to be discouraged by our lack of fruit in the Christian life. Too often I'm afraid we are just as that unfruitful fig tree of our Gospel reading. It should be easy enough to confess we have not done all things for God's glory. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. And though God has richly and daily provided us with all we need to support this body and life, we have squandered and wasted God's blessings on indulgent living, hoarding for ourselves that which should've been used to help our neighbor. As Christians we therefore know well and agree with the words of the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Nevertheless we can rejoice today because God has indeed been merciful to us. He gave us the Christmas Gift of the Babe of Bethlehem, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep who laid down His life for our salvation, rising again for our justification. Our God of Peace then does not want us to be discouraged but encouraged! Indeed in the words of our text this morning we find a wonderful strength and power to indeed be fruitful, to bear rich fruit for His kingdom! Thus as we begin a New Year in His grace, let us rejoice that in, by, and through such grace, we have God's faithful promise that He will help us to be fruitful! He will work "in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen."

I. The blood of the everlasting covenant. Our strength in sanctification, our strength for a more holy life, naturally comes from Christ, our Prince of Peace, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. What covenant is this? It is God's everlasting Gospel covenant with us sinners, namely that since Jesus the very Son of God shed His holy blood for ALL SINNERS on the cross, God and man are reconciled and at peace! Hence our God of Peace sent to us the Prince of Peace who through His blood grants us spiritual peace. Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the Church calendar year then, New Year's Day is the day we mark and remember the first

blood our Lord Jesus shed for us, namely at His circumcision. It was at His circumcision Jesus began what we call His "passive obedience", namely for our sake He willingly suffered in the giving of His first blood. Christ's passive obedience, all He suffered as a Man in our stead, concerns not just the cross, but His whole life beginning at circumcision. Also at the point of circumcision, we should understand Jesus was "made under the law", namely He began His "active obedience" of God's law, "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Being under the law, Jesus would now keep ALL of God's commandments completely with a pure and constant love for God and neighbor in His heart. He would be what we so often have not been, a fruitful tree. To appreciate this point more fully, what would happen to us if Jesus had not kept the law perfectly in our stead? Had that been the case, God would only see our evil works, this corrupt tree bringing forth corrupt fruit. In the end God must cut down and cast into the fire all unfruitful and corrupt trees. That is why we rejoice that Jesus was "made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba Father." We become God's own sons and daughters merely by faith alone in Christ, His works, His righteousness, His blood shed to redeem us from all sin. Thus when we feel bad and ashamed that too often we have been unfruitful trees, we are to rejoice that through Jesus we are counted as fruitful and the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

II. God desires we be perfect in every good work.

While it is true we are often greatly troubled by our unfruitfulness, in our text today we have a most glorious promise from God, that "Through the blood of the everlasting covenant", He will "make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight!" Here is indeed a high and wonderful promise from God, that through His blood He will help us to do those works that are perfect and pleasing in His sight! Indeed He will work in us, yea through us, so that we will keep His commandments, resist evil, and even be fruitful in all things! Not only does God through faith create the will in us to do all that is good, but here let us rejoice He also promises to

help us DO HIS WILL, “working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.” Thus dear Christian consider well, if God sincerely promises you that for the sake of His everlasting Gospel covenant He will help you to be more fruitful, won’t you rejoice in the knowledge that you will indeed be more fruitful? Hebrews 13:21 then is similar to Philippians 2:13 which says, “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Thus instead of look back at our unfruitful 2009, let us look forward in faith to a fruitful 2010. In the days ahead we have God’s promise that His Spirit will work “in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.”

Imagine then a child who is told by his father to shovel all the snow in the driveway. When only half the work is done the child is very tired and discouraged thinking he cannot go on. Then suddenly the father comes out saying, “Don’t be discouraged, I will now help you.” Not only does He promise to help, but He immediately begins to help! Won’t that encouraged child out of happiness, now redouble his efforts? Won’t he rejoice in the love of his father, especially knowing he is not alone in this work? How much more strength do we then have as Christians, knowing our kind and gentle Father in heaven does not threaten and compel us to be fruitful trees, but He instead sends us His only-begotten Son to be that fruitful tree in our place and in our stead? Jesus did ALL the work! He has ALREADY reconciled God with man! Now we need only believe in Him, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep, that Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, and heaven is our eternal home! Do you see dear Christian that when such a faith as this lives in the heart, we are that child that with great joy of heart and comfort happily shovels that driveway! He is not alone! HE IS NOT ALONE! For in all he does he knows His heavenly Father is with Him all the time, strengthening him, comforting him, giving him the hope of everlasting life!

There is then in the Bible this true picture of renewal and strength concerning good works. Though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day. Ephesians four says, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”, “Put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” “Brethren be not weary in well doing.” All these words show us that though we will indeed be tired and wearied by our own sinful flesh and that of others, our faith in Christ and through Christ will by Christ continually be renewed and strengthened, encouraged in good works. We are not

justified by them, nor saved by them, but we are justified and saved by Christ alone! But this wondrous knowledge or faith is the very thing that compels us so! Our heavenly Father then has no need to threaten us nor demand good works from that new man within us. He simply reminds us what He would like us to do, and then being reminded, we happily do so by faith, by love – faith in God, love for God, which at the same time love for our neighbor.

What is it dear child of God that your heavenly Father would have you do? “Let us not love in word only, but in deed and in truth.” Don’t just tell your wife you love her, but show her your love by giving her your time and attention. Likewise love thy neighbor as thyself. “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be ye angry and sin not, let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the things which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” We do not work hard to get rich. We work hard to provide for our loved ones and those in true need.

Finally, in closing dear Christian, let us rejoice as we begin this New Year that our Lord above is truly that Great Shepherd of the Sheep. He will therefore guard and protect us in this coming year as He has in years past. Though we can do nothing without Him, we have His certain promise that His Spirit will help our spirit to be fruitful in this New Year and “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens Me.” He will indeed work within to perfect our work, for He is that perfect work within that moves us. For “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” He will “make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”