

“Authorized by Jesus: to bear fruit!”

Scripture: Matthew 21:33-46

Graphic: all access pass, restricted area, fruit

Key Verses: 43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces fruits of the kingdom.

Theme: Through Jesus, we are given a full access pass to the kingdom of God. With that, comes great responsibility...to love, to give, to live, to bear fruit, to come, and to go! Bearing fruit is a process of planting, nurturing, growing, pruning, and harvesting spiritually mature believers.

1) Introduction

- a) Authority is the *power to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues or disputes; or the right to control, command, or determine.*
- b) Authority is power...given to someone from someone else who has more OF IT than they do.
- c) Jesus Christ has been given the authority from the Triune God to determine or control the outcome – not just circumstances and events in THIS life – but of eternity! He has the power to settle it once and for all!
- d) We’re in the second part of a five-week sermon series called *Authorized by Jesus*. Last week, we read the story about Jesus being challenged by the chief priests and the elders when he came back to Jerusalem for the final time. They didn’t like what He was doing – flipping over tables, healing people, teaching with authority. They wanted him to stop it, because it was a threat to the authority that they thought THEY had. Truth is, God had taken that authority away from them because they weren’t faithful to HIM.
- e) The parable that Jesus told them about the two sons, one who did what the father asked, and one who didn’t, gave us a picture of how the kingdom of God actually works. Those who SAY they believe, but don’t ACTUALLY believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior are not authorized to go into the kingdom. Those who do actually believe in their hearts, even though they have had sin in their lives, maybe still do, are granted the all access pass to the kingdom...working through the process of things like repentance, forgiveness, learning how to follow Jesus...
- f) As followers of Jesus, we get an all access pass...not to just go to heaven and be with Jesus...but because of Jesus, authority to go out into the world to people who need Jesus (what we learned last week), to love other people,

to give to the work of the kingdom, to come to the table for renewal, and to live in the kingdom of God now, and, as we'll learn today, to bear fruit...

- g) Who did Jesus say was going into the kingdom ahead of the chief priests and the elders? Do you remember? Was it the religious people? No! The TAX COLLECTORS and PROSTITUTES! The scum of the earth.
- h) And do you think that those sinners just like, overnight, after hearing John preach to them at the Jordan River, changed everything about their lives. Maybe! But more likely, they probably stopped doing some of the stuff that they HAD been doing that was blatantly sinful (and you can think of what that is for those two groups Jesus mentions)...and then started walking on a path, led by the Holy Spirit, to live in such a way that they could bear fruit for the kingdom...this is a process of becoming more spiritually mature than you are today. None of us has even come close to maxing out on the spiritual maturity scale, so this is good stuff for us today.
- i) As followers of Jesus, who have been given access to the King and the Kingdom, we must be producing fruit for Jesus in this life. Sinners though we may be, bearing fruit is a process that starts when we accept Christ and continues throughout our lives...
- j) Back to Matthew 21, starting in verse 33...have your Bibles open with me, or grab the Bible in the pew rack in front of you...if you don't have a Bible and would like one, come see me after worship and we will make sure you have one of your own...
- k) Let's pray...

2) Scripture

a) Read verses 33-39

- i) Let's unpack this parable for a minute...
- ii) First, who are the players in this parable? – and remember, parables are not REAL...they may have some resemblance to REALITY, but they are not narratives about something that actually happened. Whenever you read a parable, just expect that stuff is going to be exaggerated and kind of larger than life, even though it can be truer than life and stranger than fiction...it's a caricature.

- iii) First, God is the landowner. He's the head cheese...the guy with the land
- iv) The vineyard is Israel, or more specifically, it's the people of God who are faithful and true...bearing fruit for the landowner.
- v) The landowner planted the vineyard, built a fence around it, dug a winepress, and built a tower. Now, it's not totally clear here what these pieces mean, but scholars have offered, and John Wesley actually agreed, that the fence is the Law, the winepress is Jerusalem, and the watchtower is the Temple in Jerusalem.
- vi) God built the LAW, the Torah, to hold the people together and protect them from the pagan world outside, just like a fence.
- vii) The winepress, the place where the fruit is transformed into a useable product, is Jerusalem, the Holy City.
- viii) The watchtower – the place where the people could guard against any trouble from outsiders or rogues within the walls - was the Temple, the center of the society.
- ix) So there's the scenery...enter the actors in this play...the tenants...(boo)
- x) See, God put the Levites, the priests in charge of the administration and spiritual health of Israel when he organized His people. He basically set the ground rules and placed the authority to keep the law and cultivate the people's spiritual health in the hands of the priests.
- xi) Back to the parable...harvest time comes and the landowner wants his produce. So the owner sent slaves to collect the produce...first one set of slaves and then a second set. But each time, the tenants (boo) killed the slaves...just killed them...
- xii) Who are the slaves? The slaves are the prophets that God sent to warn the people that they were not being faithful...that God was going to "reorient the situation" because the people's hearts were not right with God. Go back to your OT history for a moment...
- xiii) The people of Israel rejected guys like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel – major prophets who all had ultra-harsh warnings (uber-warnings) for the people. "You're not listening to God, people!

You are walking in the path of darkness! Repent and come back, God still loves you! Do it NOW!”

- xiv) And instead of listening and returning to God, they walked farther away...
- xv) Then God sent the minor prophets likes Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi – same message, “Come back to God or else! Things are bad, but we can return to God and He will make it right! Remember the promises that God made to us!”
- xvi) And again, no repentance. No return. No faithfulness in their hearts...then, for a period of a few hundred years, nothing but silence.
- xvii) And God was grieved...the slaves he sent to collect the harvest were rejected, and some were killed.
- xviii) And then God, in a moment of deep, deep love for His people, and an unwavering integrity, agreed to send His Son... “Surely, they will respect Him...surely they won’t treat HIM like they treated the slaves ...SURELY they won’t kill HIM!”
- xix) But we know what happened, don’t we. The Son here, is obviously (say obviously)...it’s Jesus, right? God sent JESUS to collect the harvest. God sent JESUS to tell us the truth once and for all...and call us back to God. But what happened...they killed him too.
- xx) Now, Matthew here, writing AFTER the resurrection of Jesus, makes a point to say that the Son was thrown OUTSIDE the vineyard and then killed. Remember what happened when Jesus was crucified...he was forced to go outside the city...to Golgotha...and it was THERE that he was hung on the cross...
- xxi) The people who God had originally put in authority over the people to nurture them, guide them, show them God’s way...those are the very people who rejected every attempt God made to call them back to Him...to call them back to righteousness and holiness.
- xxii) The cool thing is that those very same tenants are the ones that Jesus was speaking to at this moment...
- xxiii) And he asks them a question...(here we go with the questions again)

b) Read verses 40-41

- i) Now, as far as I'm concerned, the chief priests and the Pharisees – the religious leaders – made a HUGE mistake. When Jesus asks you a question, people, THINK ABOUT IT before you answer!
- ii) Seriously, you just got taken to the woodshed for not doing what God had asked you to do, and now, perhaps mere moments later, you blurt out an answer before thinking of the full ramifications OF IT? Really?
- iii) Simple question...what would the landowner do? Simple answer...he would put those wretches to a miserable death. Some of you who have the NIV translation I like even better because it says..."He will put those wretches to a wretched death." Can you just hear those guys saying that...as if they are on Jesus' side here, agreeing that what He is asking, sort of rhetorically, is true!
- iv) Yeah, put those wretches to a wretched death...and then lease the land to someone who WILL give Him the fruit...
- v) By this time, though, we know they are trapped...don't we?
- vi) Jesus then asks them ANOTHER question...this one, a plain old slap-in-the-face...verse 42...

c) Read verse 42

- i) This is like asking a pilot if he or she has ever read the manual on how to fly the 747 that they are about to thrust down the runway. It's like asking someone who bakes pies every day if they have read the recipe so they know how to do it.
- ii) This question is ridiculous and insulting. OF COURSE we've READ IT!
- iii) Psalm 118:22-23 is what Jesus is quoting here. Now, if I ask you if you've ever read in the scriptures where it says, "X", you might be able to place it in some context, if I give you enough. You may have taken time to memorize parts of scripture, which I encourage. But the priests to whom Jesus is speaking were required to memorize large parts of the Bible, including the Law and the Psalms. They had to KNOW it.
- iv) And so Jesus' question is just silly...OF COURSE WE HAVE...

- v) But Jesus is making a point, right? Parables exist to make a point...
- vi) The stone the builders rejected...the Son that the tenants (boo) rejected...has become the main stone that holds the whole building together.
- vii) This Sanctuary has a cornerstone...the first one laid...the measure from which all the other stones were placed plumb and level...
- viii) And, Jesus said, this is the Lord's doing...and it is amazing in our eyes. The fact that Jesus had to die on the cross in order for us to be able to be saved from a fruitless life is the LORD'S doing and is amazing in our eyes. If you aren't amazed by the fact the all these events took place so that you could have salvation, then go back and read about the life of Jesus. Tell others your story of how God transformed your life.
- ix) Because, it's only when we can see where we are that we can begin to move forward to where we think GOD is calling us to be...
- x) And here is it...verse 43...

d) Read verses 43-46

- i) The chief priests and the Pharisees are the ones who aren't producing the fruit of the kingdom. They are the ones who have rejected God's call to repentance and faithfulness... which came through the prophets God sent, through John, and now, through Jesus.
- ii) And now, that vineyard, that opportunity to produce fruit for God and the kingdom, is being given to those who truly want to follow Jesus...if we think back to the identity of those who ARE going into the kingdom...it's the tax collectors and the prostitutes!
- iii) I pray this morning, that each one of you are wanting God to give you the Kingdom of God, not simply because we are the tax collectors and prostitutes sometimes, but because you are a people who are producing fruit FOR the kingdom while in a state of walking away from your sin.
- iv) But what is the fruit of the kingdom and how do we produce it?

3) Applications

- i) Everyone ready for some applications, here?

- ii) It's safe to say that the biblical writers use the terms for fruit in two main ways. #1 – to refer to actual fruit...something you eat...something that is sustenance for us and for animals to nourish us...in the Garden of Eden, God gave the people fruit. Healthy vineyards produce actual fruit in the form of grapes. Healthy, growing trees and plants produce fruit. Get it?
- iii) #2, because we get #1, the biblical writers, Jesus, Paul...use the term fruit to refer to that which is produced in our lives as evidence that we are healthy living beings responding to God's call on our lives.
- iv) Now, you can exist without producing spiritual fruit. You can be alive physically, but dying spiritually. That's opposite of what God wants and what God created us to do. When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, producing fruit is not optional. In fact, it's all we do!
- v) Fruit is provision (#1) and an indication (#2) that something is going right in your life because Jesus is living IN YOU. If your life is not going so well, according to YOUR standards, or the world's, then maybe more focus on the process of planting, nurturing, growing, pruning, and harvesting spiritual fruit is needed.
- vi) Bearing fruit is a process. And just as we are likened to fruit trees that produce fruit in season, we also produce fruit in season. But just like those same trees are always growing, always maturing, we too must always be growing and maturing in our faith.
- vii) Young fruit trees don't produce fruit the same way more mature ones do. If you want fruit you have to plant a seed, nurture the seed with water and sunlight, care for the tree as it grows, and then prune the tree in order to get the fruit.
- viii) I'm not tree expert, but I know that when an apple tree grows in the woods and no one is there to care for it, the apples are small, have holes and pits, and are pretty sour. If, however, a gardener were to tend that tree, those apples would be tasty and juicy...evidence of the work that went into it.
- ix) The TLC Small Group leaders met this week and I asked them the question: "Where do you see evidence of your small groups producing fruit?" It didn't take long for the responses to come...one group is beginning to put baskets together for people at Hyde Park...another group is caring for a flower bed at church...another leader lifted up the

fact that young parents are learning to teach their children what it means to be Christians...yet another lifted up the baptisms and new members we've received...still another talked about people in their groups who witness to others easily...they went on and on bragging about you...I couldn't get them to shut up...

- x) Bearing fruit is not something that we can keep secret...and it takes work.
- xi) How are you growing spiritual in order to produce spiritual fruit? Are you planting the seeds of God's Word in your life and the lives of those around you? Are you nurturing those who are young in the faith and encouraging them to grow? Are you pruning the sin and dead material in your own life and allowing others to do the same?
- xii) Are you preparing to harvest fruit – in your life? In the lives of those around you?
- xiii) Because of the authority that comes through Jesus' own life, offered to you, you are authorized to do **ALL OF THOSE THINGS** for the kingdom.

4) Conclusion

- a) Fruit is just an outward sign of an inward faith. Fruit is getting serious about following Jesus in every aspect of your life. Bearing fruit is a life-long process of receiving nourishment from the Holy Spirit working in your life and bursting outward for the sake of the kingdom. Simply because Jesus told us to go and make disciples.
- b) This morning, we will be nourished by the food that Jesus sets before us as a symbol of our faith. Because Jesus died and rose again, we have access to eternal life, starting today.
- c) The purpose of that life is to bear kingdom fruit for Jesus...however you are gifted and called.
- d) The all access pass that Jesus has given us to be healthy living disciples starts at our baptisms and continues at His table.
- e) You are authorized by Jesus to bear fruit today...
- f) Let's pray...