Fruitful and Growing
Scripture Text: Colossians 1:1-14

Introduction

Fruitful and growing! What is your idea of bearing fruit and growing? What is your idea of the church growing this year? For most of us it will be to see more people coming to church. For some, growing will be to have more programs or events this year. For others, growing will be to see more children and youth and youth activities. All of these are very good things and things I personally want to see for this church. I would love for the church to have all of them. Could it be, though, that bearing fruit and growing is through some other means? In our study of First Corinthians, we saw how the Apostle Paul desired to see the church grow with spiritually mature people. We saw how the church’s growth should be marked not just by more people, but by more disciples of Jesus Christ. And we saw how the growth of the church is seen by a faithfulness to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the rest of the world.

Today’s passage comes from another letter written by the Apostle Paul. Actually, the letter to the Colossians names both Paul and Timothy as the authors of Colossians:

**Colossians 1:1–2** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Timothy probably served as something like Paul’s secretary, writing on behalf of Paul. Paul wrote this letter to Christians living in the small city of Colossae. This city was in what is modern day Turkey situated about one hundred miles east of the city of Ephesus. The church at Colossae was likely established during Paul’s third missionary journey as he ministered for three years in Ephesus. Paul probably wrote this letter to the Colossians while he was imprisoned in Rome about thirty years after the resurrection of Christ, roughly about the same time he wrote the letters Philemon and Ephesians.

At the time of this writing, Paul had likely received some bad news of a dangerous teaching threatening the church at Colossae. We do not know exactly what this teaching was, but Paul wrote the letter to respond to a situation and to encourage the believers in their growth toward Christian maturity. In this brief letter, Paul emphasized the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all powers and he asserted the unity of all Christians with Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul’s letter to the Colossians is considered by some to be one of the most thoroughly Christ-centered books in the Bible. It is focused primarily on the divine and exalted person of Jesus Christ. As we go through this letter, I am going to take every opportunity to point out the supremacy of Jesus Christ, the importance of the gospel, and our duty as God’s people to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The main question I want to keep in mind as we look at this letter is this: Are we growing in Christ and are we making disciples of Him?
The Christian Hope

One of the first things Paul reminds the Colossians is about their hope in Christ. Hope is an important part of our Christian faith. Sometimes life can seem hopeless, though. Things may happen and life can seem just a bit uncertain. Maybe you have felt that way. Maybe you are feeling that way now. The good news of Jesus Christ is that you do not have to feel hopeless. In fact, it is because of the gospel, because of Jesus Christ, that we have hope.

Paul mentioned in verse three, “we always thank God...when we pray for you...because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.” Notice that Paul mentioned being thankful and praying for others. There is reason to be thankful, especially when we pray to God, because we, God’s people, the church, have a hope that is imperishable, eternal, and laid up in heaven for us. It is certain and cannot be taken from us. Paul was thankful in his prayers because the Colossians had this hope. The reason they had this hope was the same reason we all have hope – our faith in Jesus Christ. Our hope is based on placing our trust in Him.

Bearing Fruit

Now, our hope in Christ produces results, or it should. Paul mentioned bearing fruit twice in the letter to the Colossians, both instances are in our passage. The first time he mentioned this was in reference to the gospel bearing fruit. The second time was in reference to the Christians in Colossae bearing fruit. In verse five Paul wrote the following:

**Colossians 1:5–6** ...you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing...

The gospel was bearing fruit. Paul was saying that the Colossians had heard the gospel, just as the whole world was hearing it. Paul referred to the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, as the word of the truth. The good news is truth. Jesus Christ came to die so that we may have life – this is good news and it is true. And this good news had come to the Colossians, and has come to us. God’s Word, the Bible, is truth. God has chosen to reveal His plan of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ by the Word of the Truth – the Bible. In the letter to the Romans, Paul mentioned the following:

**Romans 10:17** ...faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Therefore, Paul was thankful for the faith the Colossians had in Christ Jesus which came from hearing the word of the truth, the gospel. This should underscore the need for preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone. Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ. How can people hear and respond to the good news, though, unless someone tells them? How can they? That is the mission of the church – to preach this good news and make disciples of Jesus Christ. Paul was thankful for the gospel bearing fruit in the lives of the Colossians with people responding to Christ and with lives being changed.
And this was not happening just with the Colossians. In verse six, Paul mentioned that the gospel was bearing fruit and increasing, not only in the church of the Colossians but in the whole world. The early church was empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and that gospel took the whole world at that time by storm. When God’s Word is unleashed on a lost and dying world, great things will happen. It will bear fruit and increase. God declares that His Word will not return void, but will accomplish the purposes of God. (Isaiah 55:11)

Church Growth

Not only was there evidence of sharing the gospel, there was growth in the church. Church growth, however, is not always in one location. Gena and I were once members of a very large church in Raleigh. While this church had a large membership, meaning there were a lot of names on the membership roll, the pastor’s vision for “growing the church” was not to increase the number of people at that location, in that congregation. His vision to grow the church was through planting other churches. When that congregation reached a certain number of members, the church would send some of their members to another area in order to build a church in another community. I think that is a good way to define church growth. Growth by planting new churches.

The interesting thing about the church in Colossae is that Paul did not personally establish the church there. Paul had planted other churches, such as the Corinthian church, but someone else planted the church in Colossae. In fact, Paul mentioned later in the letter that he had never visited there. What might have happened is a Colossian named Epaphras traveled to Ephesus, heard and responded to the gospel as Paul preached there, and returned home to share the good news in Colossae. Paul mentioned this in verse seven.

**Colossians 1:7–8** just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Paul evidently preached the good news where this new believer, Epaphras, heard it and responded to it, and then returned to his hometown where he began sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. This resulted in the birth of the Colossian church. Growth in the church at that time happened by spreading out from the confines of one location, of one church congregation, to impact the world around them. Who at this church will be the next Epaphras? Who will be the beloved servant of Christ who shares the good news with someone else? That is how the church grows. That is how the gospel increases, by more people hearing and responding to the Word of the Truth. Will you be a part of that?

Walking Worthy of the Lord

Paul went on to comfort the Colossians, letting them know he was praying constantly for them. As the church, God’s people, it is our duty, our pleasure, to pray for one another. We all need the prayers of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. For the Colossians, Paul prayed specifically that they would know God’s will, that they would have spiritual wisdom and
understanding. The third point of Good Hope Baptist’s mission statement is “discerning the work God has called us to do.” We need to know the will of God so that we can do what He has called us to do.

Paul prayed that the Colossians would have discernment so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. The church needs to practice their faith and live their lives in such a way that glorifies God and pleases Him. Here we see the second instance of “bearing fruit” in the passage. In verse ten, Paul wrote that to walk in a “manner worthy of the Lord” would have evidence of bearing fruit, being productive, in every good work they did. We want to know what God desires for us and what work He wants us to do, and we want to be productive in doing it. Whereas before, Paul wrote about the gospel being fruitful and growing, here Paul prayed that the church would be fruitful and increase in the knowledge of God.

Paul did not pray for the church to increase in numbers, but to increase in knowing God and being faithful to Him. As God’s people, we want to be growing in faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Knowing Jesus Christ is not just a one-time decision and you are done. Knowing Jesus Christ is a relationship where His people are growing in knowledge and love of Him. And as we are growing in knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, we will bear fruit in good works, demonstrating our faith in love for one another and for those who do not know Christ. We will take every opportunity to share the good news with others!

Conclusion

So, what should our response to God’s Word be? What is He telling us to do? I would like to offer a few suggestions about our growth in Christ and being fruitful this year. As we discern God’s calling on our individual lives as well as for this church, I encourage you to pray fervently for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Pray for God to show you how you will participate in the mission of the church. As we have mentioned in Sunday School and in the worship services before, our mission as God’s people is to glorify God and to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Whatever we do, whatever event we have, or whatever work we do here, it should have that as the goal. The last verse in our passage was a reminder of what God has done for us. Paul wrote the following:

Colossians 1:13-14 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Sin has cast a darkness over mankind, but Jesus is the Light Who rescued us from the darkness. We have been transferred to Jesus’ kingdom and adopted into God’s family. We have redemption and forgiveness of sins. What unspeakable joy we have in salvation! Should we not share that incredible, awesome, miraculous, good news with the rest of the world? How will this year be different from the last one? What will be different for you and for the church? May we commit our lives to Jesus Christ, bearing fruit, growing in faith, and seeing the gospel grow from our work in Christ. May everything we do this year be for the purpose of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and making disciples of Him. Amen!