

*Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

*1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Text: Luke 8:4-15

## **“Hear, Hold and Bear Fruit”**

### **Introduction: Physical Training and Godliness**

A number of years ago, I joined a Karate *dojo* (or school) to keep fit. It is a great way to improve your health and I enjoyed doing it (even if I wasn't very good at it). While I was a member, I observed that a *dojo* is a lot like a church. It has values, requires commitment, and has a strong social aspect.

The strangest thing about the Karate school is that people will work so hard and pay so much just to get a different colored belt. There are exams and fees to move from white to yellow, yellow to orange, all the way up to black belt. After that, there are ten more degrees of black belt.

As a pastor, I often wished that the members of my church were as eager to learn as the students in the *dojo*. They would sweat, bleed, pay and pay just to get a new belt that most of them wouldn't wear in public. I wished my members would show that same kind of dedication to learning God's word.

As I worked out, I often thought of St. Paul's advice to young, Pastor Timothy. Paul writes:

1 Timothy 4:8 ...physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

If only people would be as excited about godliness as they are about sports and physical training! Godliness lasts into the next life whereas sports are only useful when you are young.

While I worked out, I imagined having a church where the newest members had to wear a white belt. They couldn't advance until they learn the Lord's Prayer, the commandments, the creed and some of our basic doctrines. After that maybe they could get a yellow belt. I wondered if that would motivate people to become knowledgeable and grow spiritually.

Most of today's Gospel lesson describes how we are saved (or justification) but the last verse describes how we grow spiritually (or sanctification). In that verse, Jesus mentions three things that lead to spiritual growth. First, we hear his word. Second, we hold to it. Third, we begin to bear fruit.

## **Hear**

Just like learning Karate, there is a certain amount of hearing that must be done to grow spiritually. First, God saves us through his word without any action on our part. Then, our instruction can begin.

In Karate, an instructor teaches a new student basic things like how to sit and stand. So in Christianity, parents, grandparents, pastors and teachers teach the basics of the faith in a simple way. A new Christian may be taught to fold his hands so that he does not do anything else with them during prayer. A new Christian may be taught to kneel before the altar as a sign of submission to God. All of this is learned by hearing or seeing in the very beginning.

## **Hold**

Once we hear his word, we need to remain faithful to it. We need to apply it to our lives on Monday and Tuesday, not just Sunday. We need to ingrain it into our daily lives as a habit every day.

Imagine trying to learn Karate one day per week. You wouldn't improve much. My instructor wanted us there 5 or 6 days per week to really get good. The same thing is true if we really want to grow as Christians.

## **Bear Fruit**

Once we hear the word and hold to the word, the word will have time to germinate within us. Then it is time for the word to bear fruit. This fruit is primarily the work of God but as part of sanctification it is partly our work too. James reminds us that we can not stop with hearing the word. He writes:

James 1:23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does.

We are to be doers of the word, not just hearers of the word. You can't learn Karate just from reading books about Karate. You can't learn Christianity just from reading the Bible. You can come to faith by reading the Bible but there is more to your life as a Christian than just reading.

Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9 are commonly cited by pastors to show that we are saved by faith, without good works. It is true that we are saved apart from good works and I am not trying to downplay that in anyway but there is a reason *why* we are saved and it comes in the next verse, verse 10. Listen to all three verses together.

NIV Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

God didn't save us so that we could just sit around like the "frozen chosen." We are saved to work.

Back in the Karate dojo, I noticed an interesting transition. When I first came, I just watched and listened. Then I started practicing. Because I was one of the few adults who went to the afternoon class, the teacher soon had me teaching new kids the basic moves. If I would have stuck with it for few more years, I would have been a well trained teacher by the time I reached black belt. That's how it should work, both in Karate and in Christianity.

A similar progression should happen in the church. At first, the pastor should minister a lot to a new believer. For a few years, a new Christian should be somewhat dependent on his pastor and the pastor should be expected to give up some of his free time to help the new Christian.

But if someone has been a Christian for forty years and is still in this "baby Christian" stage, there is a problem. Why is this person still drinking milk when he should be eating solid food? Why is this person seeking to be served, rather than serving others?

To bear fruit means to move from being ministered to, to ministering to others. Too many people don't want to give up the former and start doing the latter.

This is not to say that everyone will become a preacher but there is a point where you should be a little less dependent on your pastor. Instead of asking the pastor to visit someone, you should visit him yourself. There is a time when should start serving, rather than complaining that the pastor ignored your suggestion.

This congregation has a lot of “slots” open for service. I have heard people complain that the senior choir keeps getting smaller, but do they join? I have heard people say, “Why can’t we get the youth to volunteer for such and such?” But usually the answer is that the adults are setting the example for the youth. The adults are caught up in the riches and pleasures of this life and so the youth follow their example.

Leisure time has actually increased in the last 30 years but people feel like they have less time. Why? Because they spend more time being entertained but underestimate how much time they spend on those activities. Then they run around trying to get everything done fast so they can have more time to watch TV. The reality is that we are the most entertained generation of all time but are less involved in service than previous generations.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus gives us a great promise in this parable. He tells us that some of the seed will fall on good soil and it will increase a hundredfold. Look at your life. Are you planted on the good soil? Are you allowing God to produce that 100 fold increase in the lives of those around you? Remain in his word and that growth will follow naturally.

*May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*