

Be Not Discouraged #2

Isa. 49:4 – “Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.”

How this applies to Christ in a messianic context was covered in the previous lesson.

Application – How does this apply to us?

It is the Father’s will that we bear “much fruit”. Jn. 15:8 – “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” Christ has chosen us and ordained us to be fruitful. Jn. 15:16 – “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

Fruitfulness comes by two means – as a vine being pruned, and by the branch abiding in the vine.

Jn. 15:1-2 – “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman, Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

Jn. 15:4-5 – “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

If it is God’s will that we bear much fruit, we must ask whether we really are bearing fruit, and if not, why not?

Isa. 49:4 must surely be understood by pastors, missionaries, parents, and probably just about everyone in some sense or another: **“I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain”**. Do you look around at the sparse numbers, the lack of conversions, the rebelliousness or even mockery of those you are trying to help, the almost willful misunderstandings, the back stabbings and accusations, and the apparent fruitlessness of all your efforts? Are you tempted to despair, wondering whether you have had any effect at all?

There are many examples of such feelings, besides Christ – Joseph, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, John the Baptist.

We must admit that **sometimes these sufferings are deserved**, because of our own foolishness, disobedience, coldness, lack of prayer, self-direction, self-confidence, etc. For example, Samson. But let us leave that discussion for another time, and **today consider only those who are sincerely and genuinely seeking to serve God in his power and wisdom, in the calling he has given them, yet without apparent success.**

1. We should consider this to be a part of our bearing the sufferings of Christ. As Christ faced temptations to discouragement or despair so must we, and overcome them like he did.

Heb. 4:15 – “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

Heb. 12:3 – “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

2. We must recognize that the judgment of men means nothing - only God’s approval matters.

Mt. 25:21 – “... Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

1 Cor. 4:2-4 – “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.”

Perhaps in the eyes of the world (or family) we look like failures, but God will say “Did you obey me?”. His judgments are not always immediate. What matters is his final assessment.

1 Cor. 4:5 – “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”

3. **Perhaps apparent fruitlessness is temporary because we are in a time of pruning.** When pruning occurs, there is a drastic cutback, and for a time there is no fruit at all, but the end result is more and better fruit than would have happened if left alone.
4. **We must recognize that we have a work to do, a mission that needs to be accomplished, whether understood by men or not. Our work is what God gives us to do, not what we choose.**

Col. 4:17 – (to Archippus) “Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.”

Consider the parable of the talents. God will not ask us what our average church attendance was, or our annual budget, but how faithfully we served him with the calling and gifts he gave us. Were we “valiant for truth”?

We have a greater mission than just delivering sermons, or going to work, or watching kids. Some may be content just to give short and generally worthless sermons once a week. For them, being a pastor, priest, or minister is just a job, an occupation. But the purpose of pastors and teachers should be to “declare unto you all the counsel of God”, and to “feed the church of God” (Ac. 20:27-28).

Some parents are content to have children and then let them raise themselves, or to turn them over to the state schools as baby sitters, but God’s purpose is for us to have godly seed (Mal. 2:15). We want to lead a train of believing children and grandchildren into the kingdom. We should be training them in godliness.

5. **We must rely on God’s strength, not our own, yet God tells us to be strong.**

Prov. 24:10 – “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.” (Be a man, not a self-pitier.)

Hab. 3:19 – “The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.”

Isa. 40:29-31 – “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

6. **As Christ overcame by looking to his return to glory, so we must keep in mind our future glory with Christ.**

Jn. 17:24 – “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

7. **We must maintain an attitude of joyful faith.**

Hab. 3:17-19 – “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

8. **It is our responsibility to sow the seed or to water it, but only God can bring the increase.**

1 Cor. 3:6-8 – “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.”

Do not mimic or compare yourself with other ministries, or other people. You are only responsible for what God has given you to do. Your part is to abide in the Vine – his part is to bring the fruit.

9. **Sometimes the full fruit comes after we are gone.**

There are authors and composers who died unappreciated but later got (earthly) fame. The martyrs’ and reformers’ deaths often bore fruit later, like William Tyndale and Jim Elliot. Also consider the prayers of a mother for a wayward son. Sometimes those prayers bear fruit after her own death.

Isa. 49:4 may often be both the feelings and the confession of a person on their death bed.