

Fruit unto God

Fruitfulness

God is wanting fruit. In the beginning, 'He created the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind whose seed is in itself . . . and the earth brought forth . . . the tree yielding fruit whose seed was in itself after his kind and God saw that it was good, and the evening and the morning were the third day.'

Immediately upon opening the Bible we find that God has incorporated into creation the act and truth of fruit-bearing. He had done this that it should become a principle of life throughout the whole earth. To pursue this theme would provide us with a most fascinating study as we noted all its out-workings and applications and culminations throughout all nature. But forbearing to attempt this, we will come directly to our more immediate purpose, fruit unto God.

Re-reading the above quotation from Genesis chapter 1 and noting the time factor, we learn that 'the evening and the morning were the third day.' To the keen Bible student this statement speaks volumes, opening up many avenues of thought, but speaking chiefly of two main things, viz., the Trinity and Resurrection. Noting that the whole idea of fruit-bearing, as well as the use of the word 'fruit', is first introduced to us here in Genesis 1, we see that both plainly and suggestively the Lord sets forth His heart's desire in the dual context of resurrection and His as yet unknown triune being.

Right from the beginning God has made no secret of the fact that He wants fruit. It is not surprising, therefore, that in turning to the New Testament we discover it is in the gospel which commences 'In the beginning' that we find the record of the marvellous revelation given by the Lord Jesus of Himself as the Vine. In process of unfolding' the truth He obviously bases all His fruit-bearing upon oneness and wholeness. A vine is practically all branches. He is absolutely everything — the whole. The branches can only be thought of as branches by themselves if they be disconnected from the vine. Take away the branches and there is no vine, for apart from an unproductive basic stock it consists of nothing else. Together joined to the main stem, the branches form the Vine, which is Jesus. Moreover, we know that the sole purpose for which the vine exists is to bear fruit; apart from this it has no other usefulness at all. The Husbandman rears it for one reason only — as much fruit as it can possibly bear. Its glory is in its fruit, the evidence and abundance of its life and the reason for its existence.

Again, the vine in fruit-bearing is a perfect figure of resurrection, and as such is fully in keeping with the original idea revealed by God in Genesis 1. In growth it has no power to support itself or its fruit: It can not grow straight up from its own roots as can other sturdy fruit trees. It has to be raised and borne up by something other than itself. All branches as it is, it has to find support to which to cling while bringing forth its own life in bunches of tender, juicy flesh. So in a figure, as supported by the cross, does the true Vine grow. In resurrection life He spreads His many branches, bearing fruit by them to the eternal delight of His Husbandman Father.

There is little question that in the entire realm of fruit-bearing the vine, both factually and parabolically, is the greatest possible demonstration of the statement made by the Lord in Genesis 1:12-13.

But lower down in this same chapter a completely new aspect of fruitfulness is introduced by God, and this also He ordained into life. Although in itself it is a very different form of fruit-bearing from that which we have already been considering, it carries forward God's original desire and design for fruit-bearing and establishes it in a much more vital and important field, viz., that of human relationships (verses 26-28). In this as in the former field we find that all follows the same basic pattern. God never departs from it. Indeed He cannot, for behind all His design when establishing the principle of fruitfulness in the Earth there lay a deep desire in His heart much greater than just a concern to make providential provision for man. At the time God created vegetation man as yet had no being on Earth. The creation of man was reserved by God for the sixth day and this was but the third.

All that the Lord God did by the Spirit through the creative Word prior to the creation of man was specifically for him, and was all done in preparation for his appearing. All was an introduction to the greatest thing to which God was moving — reproduction; not only fruit, but also seed. In whatever realm it is or in whatsoever direction it may be applied, the law of life must always express or manifest itself in the same order. Here it is, as found in these verses — 'Be fruitful, multiply, replenish, subdue, have dominion.' In man, God headed up all the desires He had expressed and illustrated in the lower orders of creation.

For our purposes we need only attend to the first two words of this fivefold expression of God's intention for man, viz., 'Be fruitful, multiply.' We notice that this is almost the same idea, though uttered in different words, as the Lord Jesus incorporated in the statement concerning His own fruit-bearing through the branches of the Vine, viz., fruit, more fruit, much fruit (John 15:1-8). God wants fruit; much fruit: how much He does not say. If we were to ask, 'How much?' the answer we should receive is, 'More.' Or, if we apply this principle to the matter of reproduction by childbearing, 'Be fruitful; multiply,' and have children, more children; how many more He does not say.

It is concerning this latter application of the principle of fruit-bearing that this paper is written. We should be taken up with God's desire to have children.

Barrenness is fruitlessness

In Romans chapter 7 verses 1-4 Paul uses the figure of marriage to point many truths relating to our union with Christ, not the least of which is stated thus, 'that we should bring forth fruit unto God.' There is no doubt in Paul's mind that God is looking for what He has ordained as the normal result of marriage between Him who is risen from the dead and those who are 'dead to the law through the body of Christ,' viz., born-again ones. We may note also that Paul makes the thought of resurrection a very important one: 'married to Him who is raised from the dead.' Resurrection, marriage, fruit, is the order. No resurrection and marriage, no bringing forth of fruit.

Marriage in spirit by the Spirit to the risen Lord Jesus Christ is here set forth as the privilege of all the regenerate saints. It is taken as a foregone conclusion to being buried with Him by baptism into His death. For this is in order that we may be raised from the dead with Him, be of His resurrection and really live unto God by bringing

forth fruit unto Him. The Church's great function in this context is to be so united to her Lord and His desires that as a result God's children may come forth.

In ancient Jewry a childless marriage was reckoned to be a thing of reproach. So much so indeed, that Elisabeth the mother of John Baptist, in her joy at the knowledge of impending motherhood, bursts forth, 'Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein He looked on me, to take away my reproach among men' (Luke 1: 25). So natural is the expectation of children within the marriage bond, that it was felt something was wrong with the marriage if children did not follow as the normal fruit of the union. In the beginning God, creating man in His own image, made them male and female; together they were man. Following this He blessed them, telling them to be fruitful and multiply; and He concluded His activities that day by saying, 'It was very good.' Therefore, from the time that Moses by inspiration of God wrote the history of creation, fruitful marriages were considered blessed of the Lord.

To be married and childless then was to be either unblessed or disobedient, or perhaps both; and very little difference would be adjudged between the two. Therefore, reproach lay upon any married woman who had no children. It was felt that somehow Elisabeth had incurred God's displeasure — hence her statement. Childless couples were an enigma or a stigma.

Other women in scripture beside Elisabeth had felt the reproach of barrenness. In searching the Old Testament records, four outstanding examples of tragic barrenness and broken-heartedness are to be found in the persons of Sarah, Rachel, Hannah and the great woman of Shunem. By these women the Holy Spirit has given us an insight into the sorrow and heartache which lay behind childlessness of old, and also reveals what lies in His own heart regarding the matter.

Sarah we know was chosen of God to become the 'mother' of Israel, even as Abraham was the 'father'. Although these two knew nothing of the story of creation, yet the desires of God written deep in their nature set Sarah's heart longing for the ultimate consummation of marriage — a child of her own. She had never read those beatific, commanding words concerning fruit in Genesis 1, for they had not then been written. The world awaited the coming and calling, the commissioning and commanding of Moses ere the history of creation should be committed to men. When it came, the writing but confirmed the works of God; for Sarah, all natural, found within her as a law of her very being the human counterpart of divine longings.

The story of the great unsatisfied desire of both Abraham and Sarah is conveyed to us in chapters 15 and 16 of Genesis. In the former chapter we find the Lord comforting faithful Abraham's heart with the certainty of His promise that he should indeed have a son of his own. But such news seemed only to mock all the maternal longings of Sarah for, despite the promise, she still as yet bore him no child. It was this unfulfilled longing that led her finally to suggest to Abraham that he take Hagar to be his wife. If only she could obtain children by her handmaid. The suggestion was distasteful enough, but to Sarah who knew nothing of the saving power of Christ, the end justified the means; she wanted children.

That it was a reproach even in those days to be a childless wife is fully revealed in Hagar's attitude to her mistress, for when the Egyptian maid discovered that she was to be a mother she absolutely despised Sarah, with dire results. The bitterness of the reproach that she had not borne children so rose in her heart, that in her jealousy

Sarah persecuted Hagar until she could stand it no longer and fled into the wilderness to escape the undeserved punishment. The story of God's gracious dealings with each of those erring souls is fully told in the subsequent verses, but in the midst of all this one thing stands out clearly: Sarah's natural longing and disappointment found no consolation in anything or anyone until one day God gave her the child she desired.

As it was in the beginning, with Sarah the 'mother' of God's chosen race, so also was it the same later with Rachel and Hannah and the Shunamite, her 'daughters'. In each of them the identical aching heart-cry was there. Expressed in different ways according to the differing temperaments of each of the women, it is written into the sacred history as a lasting testimony to the misery of unfulfilled desire. It was not only the frustration of mother instinct that made Rachel cry out, 'Give me children or else I die' (Genesis 30:1), but also the sense of reproach (v. 23). The same may be said of Hannah as well, for it is recorded of her in 1 Samuel 1 that she wept much and went off her food, and 'was in bitterness of soul.'

Both these women were greatly loved by their husbands. Jacob had spent fourteen long years serving Laban, Rachel's father, as a dowry for her. But great as Jacob's love for Rachel was, her grief at her inability to bear children and her constant cry to her husband caused him at last to be very angry with her. It was not his fault she was childless, and his reply to Rachel reveals very clearly that he regarded her barrenness as something that only God could rectify.

It was the same with Elkanah, Hannah's husband, in his day. He tried by every means he knew to comfort his wife in her disappointment. He gave her special gifts connected with the yearly sacrifice, and pointed out that he was better to her than ten sons, but all to no avail; she wanted a son and nothing else would satisfy her. How plainly this is brought out in the record. Nothing brought alleviation to Hannah. The annual feast and sacrifice and worship and gifts, even though the latter were the adoring double portions of her husband's bounty, were turned in her to bitterness of soul. It seemed to her that all was in vain unless the basic reason for her union with her loving Elkanah should be fulfilled. Her yearly trip to Shiloh to worship in the temple of the Lord was sheer misery. Her enemy only took advantage of it to torment and provoke and afflict her. What was wrong with the marriage? Just one thing, she had no child. Apparently that was failure and loss without compensation.

Again, reading later in scripture in 2 Kings 4, it seems that Gehazi, Elisha's servant, rightly interprets the heart of the great woman of Shunem. In answer to the prophet's question, 'What is to be done for her?' Gehazi said, 'Verily she hath no child.' So far as we are able to see, this woman had never once mentioned her childlessness to either Elisha or Gehazi. Moreover, she did not at the time entertain any hope of ever having a child, nor did she believe it possible. In fact, she openly accused Elisha of lying to her when he promised her a son. But despite all the improbabilities and impossibilities, her heart still wanted the dear fruit of marriage.

She was a great woman, having great powers of perception with open-hearted generosity and strength of character. Doubtless had she lived within the days of the ingathering of the bridal church of Christ she would have been classed with those who could truly be called Christ-like, a living branch of the vine really bearing the fruit of the Spirit. But bearing such fruit had never satisfied her, and underneath everything Gehazi recognised it: virtues do not make up for barrenness. We see also that she was

as humble as she was great, for she sought nothing as a reward for her generosity. To be mentioned by the prophet to the king or to the captain of the host would have meant recognition and reward, riches and fame, but her answer to his suggestion of such repayment for her loving-kindness was, 'I dwell among mine own people.' She wanted nothing: she did all she did for love. But not all she was or had, nor all she did, made up for the greatest disappointment of her life — she had never embraced a son.

So in these four women we have seen that great privilege and great love, and great gifts and great character, did not make up for their obvious lack of children. They each were greatly blessed and fruitful in many things, but fruitfulness along the lines of personal gifts, or graces, or possessions, is not offered nor was it accepted as a substitute for the other greater and fundamental fruit. None of these could replace the sense of grievous and reproachful loss in the essential field of reproduction. All these women were either pitifully barren or, for some reason not disclosed, could not enjoy the blessedness of fruitfulness within the marriage union as they ought, and for which it existed. Surely divine election and surpassing love, and worthy endowments related to the commemorative sacrifice, and acknowledged greatness, considered separately or conjoined in one, wonderful as all these things are, in themselves fall woefully short of their real purpose if in any person they do not result in that kind of embodied fulfilment which is the fruit God seeks.

If we may borrow a phrase taken directly from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself in the story recorded in Luke 13: 6-9, we shall know the authentic description of the desires of His Father's heart in this matter, 'Behold . . . I come seeking fruit . . .'. Although it was spoken of other fruit and in an entirely different context, God's attitude to life is always the same, fruitfulness. There is no mistaking the plain implications and statements of the Lord; only fruitfulness justifies life. Apart from fruit-bearing, 'Why cumbereth it the ground? Cut it down.' The answer given again points the purpose for existence, 'If it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.' Both Husbandman and vine-dresser agree, and grace and time are afforded that God's purposes should be achieved. So if the purpose for which life is granted be unfulfilled, only destruction remains.

All this seems to be borne out very distinctly in the person of our blessed Lord Jesus Himself. It appears He expected and found that the result of union with His Father through death and resurrection was children, and in this He is the perfect example to His people. In Hebrews 2: 13 we find Him quoted as saying, 'I will put my trust in Him . . . behold I and the children which God hath given Me.' Thus it may not be so incongruous to consider the cry of Rachel of old as though it were found in the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself, 'Give me children or else I die,' for it is most certain that this is the true desire of the Godhead. Jesus was to be and is the captain of salvation leading many sons unto glory. Father's heart was and is wanting many, many more sons in His eternal home, each one like unto his captain Jesus, and there can be no doubt that it is for this that the Holy Ghost came. It is He alone who creates, ratifies and cements men in union with the risen Christ. This He does in order that the cry of His heart may be found upon their lips also, 'Give me children or I die.'

All those spiritual qualities (of character) that form the dispositional characteristics of life called 'the fruit of the Spirit' were to be found in the person of the Lord Jesus from His childhood upward. But this fruit, precious and vital though it is. was not sufficient

for Him and His Father. God must have children as well as progressive and maturing personal perfection in any individual.

Reproduction is fruitfulness

Throughout the whole idea of fruit-bearing in the scriptures there runs a developing line of teaching. As we have seen, this is very plain in the Lord's words concerning Himself in and through the branches under the figure of the Vine. What is true in John 15 is also true within the whole realm of fruit-bearing, whether it be in one particular instance, or in any combination of them.

As an illustration of the threefold progression already quoted in connection with the Vine (a particular instance), we may notice the Lord's teaching concerning fruit in the parable of the Sower. As given in Matthew 13 it is thirty-, sixty- and a hundred-fold. In this there is an easily recognisable equation of ideas with the parabolic teaching already referred to in John 15: fruit, more fruit, much fruit. And when we consider that Luke in dealing with the same parable only speaks of a hundredfold, it is at once clear that the Lord, while stating God's knowledgeable expectation in Matthew 13, is nevertheless revealing His dearest wish in Luke 8. There are different grades of fruit-bearing in this case because of different degrees of acceptance of the seed, but the seed is the same in every case. Given a good and honest, true and patient heart, the seed will always produce a hundredfold ; that is what God really wants. His desire is that all the seed be allowed and given the correct conditions in which to grow and perfect and reproduce its innate capacity to the uttermost.

This is especially true in the region of mixed or interrelated areas or departments of fruit-bearing. We will take the person of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ as an example of this, thus: the fruitfulness of the Vine is the fruit of the Spirit referred to in Galatians 5 : 22-24. In that chapter it is set forth in contrast to the works of the flesh, and is simply the reproduction of Christ by the Spirit in all His people as branch-members of the Vine. As already pointed out, these qualities of life were already in Jesus of Nazareth long before either His bodily baptism in Jordan or His spiritual baptism into death. But God wanted more, that is, other fruit than this. He desired fruit of a different order than that of the beautiful, righteous, holy manhood that was in His Son alone. He wanted more of that same type of man ; reproduction. Not only more fruit in the sense of greater love and joy and peace in Jesus' own personal life and habit, not just one better and greater Son, but many more sons. That is, 'more fruit' not only in the sense of improvement and enhancement of the personal perfections of His Son, but in the sense of multiplication and duplication of that original Son.

It is said of the Lord Jesus that He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. From this we conclude that His long-suffering and patience, indeed every virtue, must have been immeasurably enhanced in Him as He lay perspiring in Gethsemane and hung later, bleeding, from the cross. These last and greatest of the many atrocities that had been heaped upon Him during all His public life were turned by Him into channels of blessing for others, and means of personal growth. Thus those qualities inborn in the babe of Bethlehem and in which He grew all His youthful days up to manhood found increasing opportunity and occasion for development. All these virtues achieved their fullest and most beautiful expression in the trials and persecutions He encountered without intermission from Jordan to Calvary, where, under extreme pressure. they finally shone forth unto complete perfection. Parallel

with this development of all the personal perfections of His life runs the great, though seldom referred to desire to bring forth children, that other fruit of His union with the Father — 'the men Thou hast given Me,' as He expressed it. Finally and unashamedly He calls these His brethren.

So we find in the life of Him in whom We expect to see all righteous and eternal things perfectly expressed, the vital and precious example of the truth of interrelated fruit-bearing. This is a great and important principle of divine life, and therefore of all life. The fruit of the Spirit in our lives is the basic condition of holiness from which all reproductive living flows. God is expecting from the same union that gives rise to this personal life, that His children should come forth in abundance and multiplication.

The happenings on the day of Pentecost leave us in no doubt of this. God showed His heart to us most clearly then. Not content with baptising in the Spirit the one hundred and twenty disciples from His past period of Earth life, the Lord that day also baptised another three thousand in the same Spirit into His spiritual Body. Fruitfulness, multiplication — the first two words of the blessing originally pronounced in Genesis 1 find absolutely accurate fulfilment here, as in the same Spirit of creation He commences the creation/ genesis of the New Testament. The Lord Jesus had originally chosen twelve disciples. but by the commencement of the day of Pentecost there were one hundred and twenty, a multiplication of that number by ten. This was the result of over three years' work, but by the end of that same day there was a further multiplication of both the original number and also of the one hundred and twenty. For by then the original twelve had multiplied itself two hundred and fifty times, and the one hundred and twenty had multiplied twenty-five times. In such powerful, characteristic and unmistakable manner God made His intention quite plain. This demonstration remains for ever before our eyes in sacred writ.

We are to be married unto Him who is raised from the dead that we should bring forth this kind of fruit unto God. Our God has not changed one little bit since that day when at first in Genesis He plainly stated His purpose for instituting marriage. Later when He poured forth His Spirit at the beginning of this era of grace, He did it to carry out and perfect this word in the relationship between Christ and the Church. It was for this great spiritual fulfilment that all was instituted and ordained; 'Of **Him** and through **Him** and to **Him** are all things.'

It is significant that of the four Gospels it is the Gospel that speaks of being 'born again' that also speaks most of love and of eternal life, as well as of the Vine. It is in this background also that the glorious theme of Bride and Bridegroom is introduced. In fact, it is interesting to note in reading John's gospel that we find all the teaching therein is entirely based on and derived from relationships: the Word and God, the Bride and Bridegroom, Disciples and Lord, Branch and Vine, Sheep and Shepherd, and so on.

In the first verse and chorus of a lovely hymn Joy Palmer wrote many years ago, she expressed beautifully the Bride and Bridegroom relationship between the Church and the Lord Jesus Christ in these words:

Thou dost seek a bride all pure and holy,
Those who now belong to Thee alone,
Those who give Thee all their heart's affections,
Of Thyself a part, bone of Thy bone.

Chorus:

Lord we answer to Thy heart's deep longing,
'Even so come quickly, Lord,' we say;
In our hearts we have Thy blessed answer,
'Rise my love, my fair one, come away.'

Pursuing this theme, so sweetly captured for us in these lines, it is not surprising that as we read John's selective account of the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ, we come first upon a wedding. We also notice, perhaps with less surprise, that it is here the Lord severs Himself from His mother. Already He has commenced to gather the nucleus of the company that should form His Bride, so a wedding was a singularly appropriate place for that which He knew He had to do. For there, in elaborate ceremony before their eyes, a man and a woman had enacted one of the dearest, deepest, sweetest spiritual secrets of His heart. The Bridegroom had taken a Bride. He had left all for her and she had left all for him. So, with the beginnings of all His ideals emerging into reality around **Him** and being dimly pictured before **Him**, the Lord makes plain His mission of love among men. Turning to Mary, He says, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' He leaves her for His Bride.

Amid the pleasantries of this marriage He performs His first miracle sign. At first sight it seems so insignificant: if it was a sign, what was it a sign of? Was it done just out of neighbourly love? — for surely enough He loved His neighbour as Himself. Or was it done out of sheer good nature? Why did He perform such a miracle, and why record such a seemingly unimportant thing? There are, no doubt, more answers than one to our questions, but the one great overwhelming reason which may not at first be apparent is simply this: love: pure, eternal love. Complete Self-giving unto utter fulfilment, by living in another as the beloved treasure and only one of the heart. But this can only be seen as the miracle is understood in its scriptural setting. Although it is set right at the beginning of the Gospel, it nevertheless tells its deepest, truest message as though coming at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. For in spiritual meaning and experience that is where it truly belongs.

In writing his Gospel of the Son of God, John sets out with the heart of a lover, under the hand of the Spirit, to select those incidents that best set forth the story of the real romance of Heaven. Rather than give us a full account of His many miracles and journeys and encounters with friends and enemies as he could have done, and as others did, John presents us with a picture of Heaven's great Lover coming down to seek a lover from Earth.

In common with the other Gospels, this Gospel introduces us almost immediately to the Lord's baptism in Jordan. John Baptist was 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness' so he said, and people went out to listen to him. 'What is he really saying?' they inquired of one another. They were musing in their hearts whether or not he was trying to tell them he was the Christ. Certainly he was a great prophet and a burning, shining light; what he said and did was new: was he really the Messiah? But John was not doing or saying any such thing as they thought: he was just a voice, that was all.

Then one day when all men were gathered round him, the Voice spoke the Word everyone was listening for. John looked up and saw Jesus coming to him and immediately he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' This is **He**... this is the son of God... He will baptise you with the Holy Ghost

and fire. So it was that with many other similar and additional phrases John spoke forth that Word which was in the beginning with God, and was God, and was manifest in the flesh for all to know **Him**. On that day the Word went to the Voice and he baptised Him in Jordan.

The Voice had to speak the word of God properly, according to the eternal plan of heaven and the deepest desires of His heart. So pictorially, before the eyes of all, Heaven's Lover, God's great love-gift to men, went down into death and rose again from the waters to show He was the Resurrection and the Life.

Now it is of particular importance that we note here the time factor given for the wedding in Cana of Galilee — the third day. The day of Resurrection, the number of the Trinity. In a flash our minds move back to the statement in Genesis 1, and then forward to the Easter day as yet lying historically ahead; and to God; the third day is Resurrection. Here then we have the setting for the miracle.

Jesus went to the wedding that day with one real purpose underlying all others. He would show forth His glory in the proper setting. It is as though freshly risen from the death wherein He had made His Bride's death His, and His death hers, He went to Cana seeking a Bride, there to reveal as He could something of His heart's great love as He sought her.

Much of the detail passes unnoted by the writer until an emergency brings **Him** into the scene. Mary comes to **Him** saying, 'They have no wine,' and the moment has arrived. In His heart He knew what He would do, but He could not do it at her suggestion. Had not the scripture said upon one occasion, 'Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood'? But He would not allow it to be so now with **Him**. He had told her eighteen years earlier that He must be about His Father's business, not hers; He had also come to this marriage and this moment to do God's will, not Mary's. Though the occasion was vital and a minor crisis had arisen for that festal company, and though also He knew what He would do, He dared not act at Mary's word; she could be no vine in His blood from whence the act that would supply wine for the wedding should flow. So He cut her off. He had nothing to do with her; He was not her child, but God's. By flesh He was Mary's; but by life, will, nature, character, mind, soul and total embodiment He was His Father's.

She had known this right from the beginning, of course. When she consented to the word of the angel at the first she was plainly told by him that 'the holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' She had agreed that He should not be called the son of Mary; Jesus was only carrying the original word through to its logical conclusion and applying it at this vital moment. He knew He had nothing to do with Mary in this, and she also knew she could have nothing to do with **Him**. His hour had not yet come; He could show forth His glory at Cana, but not yet His love fully as He wanted; that must await Calvary and Pentecost. But He could make His glory serve His love for this occasion. He could make the miracle speak of things greater than the witnesses or beneficiaries then knew. So, as though His life had been lived, and the grapes of His abundance grown and plucked and pressed, and the wine caught and stored and matured and outpoured, He presents the best wine to the governor of the feast.

He watches as the Bridegroom is congratulated and drinks wine with His **Bride**, and He is satisfied. That He was not praised and thanked did not in the least matter to

Him. The proper use of gifts and powers should always apply the death of the cross to the user, and the blessings of it to those upon whom the benefits are bestowed. The Bridegroom was thanked and praised; that was the whole point. His turn would come. It was fixed in Heaven. Three years would soon pass. It would seem like three days so great was His love for His Bride. Was it not the **third** day for which He looked?

For those who have eyes to see what He did at Cana, all is a parable, an allegory. He has set forth the best wine He could possibly give to His beloved Bride, He has given her His own life. It was the truest anticipation of the great Pentecostal festivity when His Bride would drink the real wine new with **Him** in His Kingdom of love. How truly He made that marriage feast serve His purposes. The setting was perfect, the occasion unique, the vital elements absolutely correct. The water signified the Spirit; the wine His life by the Spirit, His Soul. The Spirit and His Life. His Life was God the Spirit; the Spirit in human being, by a body, living out all possible virtue in perfect love under the most extreme conditions a human soul could endure.

So it was on the day of Pentecost; He poured out the pure water of the Holy Spirit; they drank it, and lo, it was the wine of His Life, best new wine. More, they were also baptised in it and became bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, His very body. Twain had become one; Bridegroom and Bride were Lamb and Wife in Spirit. It was done.

Thus He accomplished His purpose at Cana. The first great physical miracle of the Gospels had been performed. The inaugural sign of the New Covenant had been given and the whole new order had been anticipated and figuratively established.

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All the time He was on Earth, Jesus was looking forward to 'that day' of which He spoke in John 14: 18,20. His people would know then that He was in the Father and they in Him and He in them. It was perfect. He would sit on the throne and pour out the Spirit and Himself by the Spirit, and His people would become one flesh with **Him** — His Bride; the Spirit and the Wine would be but one, and she, His lovely Bride, would drink of His life, His soul, **Himself**, just **Him** — the new Wine. What He had now set forth as a wondrous miracle of personal power would then be love, absolute love; bliss, joy, ecstasy, the eternal life as planned for all His lovers. Quite properly what took place at Cana was a sign, for it was not only absolutely consistent with the need of the hour, but also with His true state of life, and with His future intentions as well as with the eternal order of things. Amen. It could be, for at thirty He was as perfect in spiritual life, moral quality and human character as He was at thirty-three.

The Bride loves **Him**, drinks **Him**, shares **Him**, they drink one Wine together; Jesus after the Spirit. That human life once lived in the flesh, interpreted and brought into the Bride by the Spirit to become her flesh — perfect. But whereas at Cana the best came last, this best is given first in God's order. The Governor of God's feast sets forth the best wine first, last, and all the time, viz., the inner spiritual perfections and glories of the Man Christ Jesus as He lived among men privately and publicly, and died sacrificially upon the cross.

This then is that which is first — the pure new Wine for the Bride; utter and eternal love; Jesus. So drinking and uniting with **Him** she becomes with **Him** a kind of firstfruits.

But the inward marriage secure, she now must realise with **Him** what is the hope of her calling and of her union with such a husband as Christ. Married to **Him** she must bring forth fruit unto God. Her Lord is wanting children.

The earliest known members of the Bride of His heart were in no doubt of it. By the end of that historic day of Pentecost three thousand souls were also with them baptised into His body. Right there and then in the opening phase of 'the last days,' and later as it developed in full power, men and women were born of God, borne of the Church as He said. They indeed brought forth fruit unto God: the Acts of the Apostles is the revelation of it. The Church continued as it commenced — the Bride of Christ. These people were married to their glorious Lord, fresh risen from the dead.

On the day Rachel cried out in her wretchedness to Jacob, 'Give me children or else I die,' she was an utterly convinced woman. She had reached the point of extremity. That it was her Jacob's will to have children she could not doubt. All around, laughing, crying, eating, standing, sitting, crawling, walking, growing, working, Jacob's desire lived before her in the flesh. But they were torment to her soul, a knife in her bosom and condemnation to her life. Other people's sons mocked her desire, emphasised her barrenness, and challenged her womanhood. They could not satisfy her own emptiness nor compensate her own unproductiveness. They were all of them his children, but not hers.

How could she bear it? If her anguished cry meant anything at all, it meant that to her now life only lay in bearing children. Once it had lain in Jacob's surpassing love for her, in his choice of her above all women. For long enough she had reposed there, secure in his adoring devotion. But gradually the years of love had become more and more tinged with sorrow, until now she did not want to continue to live in his love any longer unless he could give her children. Death seemed more desirable. So also perhaps it could be said of Sarah and Hannah and the Shunamite and Elisabeth. They never said so, but does such a thing ever require words? Such grievous longing lies so deep that seldom can it find expression. The mute testimony is so obvious to all. Silence, shame and sorrow often — only too often — cover heartbreak with a smile.

When we meet them upon the sacred page we find that in all these five women disappointment and frustration had long since soured sweet hope into bitterness and despair. Yet nature itself had refused to allow them to sink into black abandonment to ultimate barrenness. With God nothing is impossible. If Abraham's name means 'High, or great father of a multitude,' then princess Sarah will beg him to give her children and fulfil himself by Hagar; Rachel will cry out in her desire; Hannah will pray in her bitterness; the Shunammite's inner control will finally break to reveal her bleeding soul secret; while Elisabeth's modest incredulity will reveal her joy that the disappointment has ended in blessed hope.

Each of them in time clasped her son to her bosom; her own, her very own. Sarah her laughing Isaac, Rachel her fruitful Joseph, Hannah her dedicated prophet Samuel, the Shunammite her dear dying and living son, and Elisabeth her spirit-filled John, the man sent from God. Their glad hearts saw long-deferred hope realised at last in children and their sickness passed away.

So ought it to be with her who is married unto Him who is raised from the dead. Deep longings for His children, true fruit of the sacred union, should lie in every heart so spiritually united with its Lord ; that they do in Him, there can be no doubt.

Our blessed Lord's prayer to the Father on the great day of sorrow as He moved toward Gethsemane leaves little to the imagination on this point. First praying that His apostles may be granted life in the union of Himself and His Father, He next proceeds to pray for those who should believe on Him through their word. Thinking ahead, His heart ranged over the entire future to include us all who should believe unto that same life. Strong desire possessed **Him** then as **He** faced Calvary. Nothing mattered now save the paternal longings of His Father's heart and His own Husbandly desires to beget sons. Anything, yea everything in God's will, whatever the personal cost may be. It is almost as though one could hear a cry strongly akin to Rachel's upon His lips, 'Give me children and I will die.' He died and rose again that God might have children; children who must be born — but who will bear them?

Fruit unto God

Since that far off day when God spoke the memorable words over His creation, fruitfulness and multiplication have become laws of life. Whether in the animal kingdom, or the world of vegetation; in the physical realm or in the spiritual; whether it be sea or land or air or in heaven itself, everywhere the truth stands fast, 'Be fruitful and multiply.' Certainly it is law for the Church; it is inescapable.

The apostle Paul in his unparalleled ministry to God and man was swept along by the same burning desire that was in his Lord. From the beginning of this man's ministry to the end, his desires remained invariable, his childbearing constant. Speaking of himself as 'one born out of due time', he feels as His Lord and Husband does about all men. He uses the thought of self-death for others' birth and life, just as Rachel and the Lord Himself did, though in a different way. 'Death worketh in us but life in you,' he says to the Corinthians; while to the Romans he wrote, 'I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.' What use a kinship by a first birth without a kinship by a second? Thus is eternal truth and his heart laid bare as one. Earlier he had written to the Galatians (4:19), 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again.' And to the Thessalonians, 'What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?' (1 Thessalonians 2:19). Also to the Corinthians, 'I have begotten you through the gospel,' (1 Corinthians 4:15). While at the end of his life, awaiting execution, he wrote to his friend Philemon concerning 'Onesimus (his son, he called him) whom I have begotten in my bonds.'

John, too, delights in the fruitfulness of his union with his Lord. His letters are studded with loving references to 'My children', and 'little children', 'my little children', and others' children too. Peter also speaks of 'new-born babes' and 'dear children', as he takes up his pen to minister to those who by a second birth have become strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

These men did not cry for converts; they did not count heads nor ask for shows of hands; they longed, and laboured, and travailed for children, God's children. They were married to Jesus Christ. They could not rest until by their own love-labour many were brought forth in His nature, to develop into the image of their Husband and be perfected in His likeness. The Church of the first-born loved Him unto total abandonment to His desires. Not for them a resting in an initial comfort of salvation from hell, or in perfecting their own holiness, though this is a very fruitful hill indeed. Beyond all this, urged on by His Spirit, they desired complete absorption in their Jesus unto utter involvement in His inwardness of longing. They entered into His

eternal reasons for coming to Earth and Calvary, to cursing, and ripping, and near disembowelment, and heartbreak, and love for men as men could feel and understand it. Love, profound, crying, caring, desiring, hoping, conceiving, begetting. All-comprehensive love.

They married **Him** and love; they caught the sweet pain of His heart, and joined with the powerful longing that **He** was, and became one with **Him** to the begetting of His children. The pure, holy fire of **Him** devoured them; they loved and lived and longed with **Him**, and the children came forth as the natural fruit of the union. They did not die childless, nor have they left their name for a reproach among men.

They served **Him**, but they were not content with service. Servants serve and can accomplish much in their service, but the wife brings forth the children, Powers, gifts, ministries, talents, pounds, all have a place in a great house, but servants cannot forever abide in it. Serve in it they may with all trustworthiness and with great acceptance and brilliance, and possess great abilities for management and administration. Their Lord and Master may be much pleased with them, but who bears the children? None but she who is married to her Lord, whose cry is 'Give me children or else I die.' Her relationship to **Him** is beyond that of slave to Master; He must be her Lord, but she is His Wife. So are the children brought forth.

For ever virgin, she is yet not barren for she retains her first-love for Jesus and never departs from or loses it, yet being married thus to **Him** she bears the children of that love and is both Bride and Wife at once. Virgin in heart-purity, she abides self-giving in love to **Him**, separate from sinners and wholly sanctified unto the Master's use. Wife in life-union, she serves **Him** in selfless devotion, utterly yielded, totally involved until Love's children stand around her regenerate. This is the normal spiritual order. To be saved is important but insufficient; to be entirely sanctified is more important but not enough; to serve is commendable and reasonable; but to be the Bride is to be the Lord's wife — consummation.

Bridal exclusiveness must consummate in wifely, motherly usefulness. Heart-pure love must become body-yielding service, and both must be held in their primal, complementary states and order (Romans 12: 1-3), neither of them changing or destroying the other. The Bride must become the Wife, she must be given children or she will die. Fruit, more fruit, much fruit — 'I and the children God hath given me.' The cry must be answered and the statement justified; the longing must be fulfilled. God must have fruit.