

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. (NIV84)

Theme: Follow the Example of the Early Christians

1. Spread the seed like Epaphras.
2. Produce fruit like the Colossians.

There are many different analogies found on the pages of Scripture. Today we see one of the most common analogies: that of seeds, plants, fruit, and harvesting. It is used often in Scripture because it works so well to describe the faith and life of a Christian.

In our text for today we see two examples of different parts of that analogy. So follow the example of the early Christians. Spread seed like Epaphras and produce fruit like the Colossians.

In order for a seed to bear fruit, it must first be planted in the ground. It needs to be watered and receive nourishment from the soil. The seed would then germinate and grow into a strong healthy plant. That plant would grow fruit. Eventually the fruit would ripen and would be harvested.

The life cycle of a plant, mimics the life and faith of a Christian. In order for someone to have faith, someone needs to plant the seed. The seed is the gospel. And the Holy Spirit works through the gospel and brings people faith. The seed is planted when the gospel is spread. And the Holy Spirit turns that little seed into faith. And through continued exposure to the gospel, the Holy Spirit strengthens that faith—and makes it into a healthy plant. And faith results in the believer bearing fruit. His faith leads him to do good works.

In the first verse of our text for today Paul said, **We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith.** Paul and Timothy always thanked God because the Colossians were believers. But how did they become believers? Someone had to plant the seed. They had to share the gospel. Paul or Timothy had never been there before. We find out later that it was Epaphras. Epaphras was the one who shared his faith to the people in Colossae. Later he went on to spread the gospel elsewhere and eventually became a companion of Paul. We are not exactly sure how large the congregation was in Colossae. But it really doesn't matter. It was through the Epaphras' spreading of the gospel that the Holy Spirit started a congregation. Many people who were lost in darkness had been brought to the light of the gospel. And it wasn't as if it would have been a hard thing for Epaphras to do. He longed to tell people of his one and only Savior. We wanted to share the joy of forgiveness, and the sure confidence of eternal life. So he told those he knew and didn't know in his hometown and beyond.

We are to follow the example of Epaphras. And I ask you, who are you an "Epaphras" to? Who can say that they are believer through the gospel that you shared with them? How many people have you shared your faith with? Sure, I would hope that your children can say that about you. But that is a little bit different. How many of your relatives, your friends and neighbors can say that you shared the gospel with them? Is that number large enough to start a congregation like the Holy Spirit did through the words of Epaphras?

Sadly, we often don't share our faith like Epaphras. We keep our mouths shut. For whatever reason, we fail to share our faith. Perhaps it is because we are afraid of what people will think of us. We don't want to be laughed at or ridiculed because we talked to someone about Jesus. We are just trying to fit in, and don't want to become an outsider because of our faith. Perhaps it is because we are too busy. We find other things as more important than telling someone about their Savior. Or we consider it the pastor's job to tell someone about Christ. Failing to tell someone about Christ is often a symptom of a greater in. It often indicates a lack of love for Christ. You are essentially saying that we don't love God enough to tell others about him.

When you find ourselves struggling to follow the example of Epaphras, look at what happens when the gospel is spread. You believe, don't you? Someone had to share the gospel with you, and the Holy Spirit worked through that gospel and brought you to faith. So you want to share the gospel with others. So that the Holy Spirit may bring them to faith. So we tell them about God's Son who willing came down to live on this sin-filled earth. He lived a perfect life that we could not live. And yet when he was being murdered on the cross, he took all our sins upon himself. He became guilty of everything we have ever done so that we may not be condemned. And three days later he rose from the dead and promises us that we too will rise from the dead and live with him forever. And we can tell someone that God gives us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life by his grace alone—we don't have to do anything to earn his favor.

It is the greatest story ever. And we want everyone to know it. We want everyone to be a part of it. So we spread the Word. How could we not when we remember everything the Lord has done for us? You see then, following Epaphras—spreading the seed, is a fruit of faith. We believe therefore we share. Our sins are forgiven; we will live in heaven—and we want others to know the same joy as well. So like Epaphras we share the gospel. And we pray that through the gospel that we share the Holy Spirit may bring many people into the one true faith.

But it's not just the sower—Epaphras that we follow. We also follow the example of the plant—the Colossians.

Paul certainly gave thanks to God for the faith of the Colossians. But it wasn't just for the faith of the Colossians, it was also for their fruit. He thanked God for the good works the Colossians' faith produced. He thanked God for their love for the saints. Christians love one another. They love because God first loved us by sending his Son. And the Son loved us by giving up his life for us. No matter what differences Christians have between one another, they realize that they are all believers in Christ. They have been chosen by God from before the creation of the world to be his very own. Therefore they show love to all each other. Sure, they show love to all people. But there is a special bond between fellow Christians—one that manifests itself in love.

Paul also thanked God for the hope that they had. This hope **is stored up for you in heaven**. This is the hope of eternal life. As the Colossians went through their life they had the hope of better times. They had the hope that they would be taken from this veil of tears to the joys of eternal life in heaven. And this hope wasn't just a wish. It wasn't something they longed for but something unattainable, like how I wish I could dunk a basketball. No this hope is a sure conviction. It is being assured that eternal life is awaiting us through the work of our Savior. Through faith we know that we have eternal life. For it doesn't depend on us, but on Christ who lived, died, and rose for us.

And where does this hope come from? It can't come from them. It doesn't come from others. It comes only through the gospel of Jesus Christ. For without the gospel we have no hope. Without hearing about Jesus Christ we have no hope of eternal life. Without Christ we are dead, spiritually and eternally.

And without Christ we don't show love. Sure unbelievers may do the same thing as believers. But one shows love, the other doesn't. One does a good work, the other cannot. That is because one loves out of love for Christ. And one loves for selfish reasons. One shows love to others out of love and thanks for what Christ has done for us. One shows love to others in order to be loved back, to gain something in return, or simply because society forces them to.

Love and hope stem from faith. They are a result of having been brought to faith by the Holy Spirit. And since faith comes only through the gospel, good works stem only through the gospel. The more we hear the gospel, the stronger our faith becomes and more fruit we bear. For the gospel increases itself. The gospel is like a strawberry plant, or other plants that do a similar thing. They grow and produce fruit, then they send off shoots that plant themselves in the ground. And from the shoot another plant grows that also bears fruit. The gospel creates a Christian. The Christian plants spread the gospel which produces another plant. And when that new Christian is fed and nourished by the Holy Spirit, he too will bear good fruit.

And good works show our faith. You see, faith is invisible. We cannot read a person's heart. We cannot truly know what he believes. But Jesus says Matthew seven, **by their fruit you will recognize them**. You may recognize whether someone is a Christian or not by

the fruit that they bear. Our fruit indicates what types of plants we truly are. Does your fruit indicate that the power of the invisible Word is working inside of you? Can people tell who you are by what you do?

Sadly our fruit doesn't bear a good witness. The fruits of our faith are sometimes lacking. And we may fail to follow the example of the Colossians. We fail to show love to someone. We bicker, fight, gossip, and so on about others—even our fellow believers. We often express our despair about death and the life to come. We are sometimes doubtful as to what will happen when we die. And there are many times when we fail to follow the example of Epaphras by not sharing our faith. And sharing the gospel is perhaps the ultimate fruit of faith.

At times we may not show our faith through our fruit. But that is not from lack of trying. As Christians we know the gospel. We know that it is the only means by which we obtain eternal life. And we want others to know that is well. So we spread the gospel. And we live a life of faith. For the love you show goes a long way in your ability to share the gospel with others. If you are not loving to a person, why would they listen to you about your faith? If you don't show that you are serious about your faith, then why would someone listen to you when you tell them about their Savior? As Christians our whole lives—our words, expressions, and actions are done for Christ. We live in view of our Savior and his gospel.

Since we know Christ, we bear fruit. And since we know about what Christ has done we want others to know it as well. So the gospel increases itself. As we spread the Word a new plant takes root. And that plant will too bear fruit. And we know that in the end we will be harvested. Not to be devoured, but to be saved. To be taken to the God's house. So we can dwell with him forever.

Let us follow the examples of Epaphras and the Colossians. Like us, they were brought to faith by the Holy Spirit working through the gospel. These Christian plants produced fruits of faith. And so do we by showing the love of Christ, expressing the hope of eternal life, and spreading the gospel of our one and only Savior. Amen.