

What Does It Take to Make a Good Apple?

Last week I returned from a preaching engagement in the beautiful Finger Lake District of New York. It was unseasonably cold, never getting above freezing in the daytime and down to the teens at night. It snowed almost constantly while I was there. There are two items I want in my room while I am away from home, drinking water and apples. On the way to my room we stopped by the grocer in Geneva and I could smell the unmistakable smell of fresh apples. There were Honeycrisp, Delicious, Rome and Macintosh, just to name a few. One of my favorites is the Honeycrisp. I held one of the beauties in my hand and asked where these were grown. His answer was one which I would not have heard had I asked the same question in Houston. He replied, "Just up the road." Not only were these apples grown just up the road, but also they were picked not long ago. I brought four apples home and this morning Barbara and I were treating these beautiful bulbs as our breakfast desert. With apple still in our mouths, I was commenting again about how cold this thinned-blooded southerner (myself) had become while in New York. Then my Indiana-born and -reared wife said with a smile, "Yes, but you would not have gotten an apple that tastes this good without the cold weather." You know, she was right.

This leads me to the subject of our conversation today. We are preparing to celebrate Thanksgiving. This is a wonderful time of the year, when we lift our praise to God for His watch care and abundant mercy to us throughout the year. It is a time when the farmers joy over their harvest. We see the symbol of Thanksgiving being the pumpkin, the horn of plenty and other visible signs of the harvest. There is so much more that goes into a celebration of harvest than a comfortable Indian summer and a table running over with delicious food. I want to talk about what it takes to make a good apple or other fruits of harvest.

1. It takes plowing.

The Bible says, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; *break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you*" (Hosea 10:12). As the farmer looks to his land, he understands it is going to take the sweat of his face to get results. The soil must be broken so it may receive the seed. The fallow ground is also mentioned in Jeremiah 4:3, "...*Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns*" (Jeremiah 4:3). The fallow ground is the ground that has lain unused for some time in order for it to be replenished in nutrients and growing power. It is land that has been very serviceable in time past and is now covered over with thorns, weeds and nettles. The job of the farmer is plowing under the weeded growth, turn the soil over and get it ready for new crops.

The application to the human heart carries over. We sometimes lose our productivity in the earth. Our testimonies sometime tarnish from disuse. When we tell of God's gracious favor and working in our lives we sometimes have to go too far back in time. We need a present day testimony of the reality of God in our lives. What has God done for you this past year, month, week or day? If we have to hesitate and think, it has been too long. Our answer should be, "Where can I begin!" When we become like this we need to say, "Lord help me break up this fallow ground."

2. It takes planting.

"*And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*" (Mark 4:26-28). This is the mystery of God's ways. How does a little seed get buried in the dirt

and get resurrected? This is something that God places in nature. God makes the dirt, the seed and controls the elements. It is our duty to get the seed into the ground.

God, through His prophet, asks the simple question, *“Is the seed yet in the barn?”* (Haggai 2:19). There will be no crops to harvest if the seed stays in the barn. In church work, we need to understand the importance of seed planting. Paul said, *“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase”* (I Corinthians 3:6). The Psalmist said, *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:6).

3. It takes seasons.

“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years” (Genesis 1:14). *“He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down”* (Psalm 104:19) *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven”* (Ecclesiastes 3:1). As we see from these Scriptures, God has ordained seasons of the year to modulate the patterns required for growth. There are four seasons, spring, summer, autumn or fall and winter. I could talk about the other seasons with equal time, but I want to talk about the need of winter. Winter shall be here until time is no longer. *“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease”* (Genesis 8:22). *“Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter”* (Psalm 74:17).

I return to something my wife said while we were enjoying the apples from New York, “You would not have gotten an apple that tastes this good without the cold weather.” In winter the life goes into dormancy, but it doesn’t mean that nothing is happening. Germs are dying off. The soil is being purified and strengthened. The whole environment is being prepared by the cold, the snows and the wind. John Bunyan said, “It is said that in some countries trees will grow, but will bear no fruit, because there is no winter there.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, “Sometimes our fate resembles a fruit tree in winter. Who would think that those branches would turn green again and blossom, but we hope it, we know it.” We rely not on “fate” as Goethe said, but on the Providence of God. As surely as winter comes, there is a promise resurrection, a harvest yet to come. Solomon put it like this: *“For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell”* (Song of Solomon 2:11-13).

4. It takes God.

Man can plow, plant and irrigate, but all the glory, praise and honor goes to God. God gives the water: *“...I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing”* (Ezekiel 34:26). The farmers are all very aware of the need of sunlight for the crops and the moon that reflects the sun and times the seasons. God has given to us, *“The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever”* (Psalms 136:8). Every honest farmer, even the agnostic, will have to admit we are at the mercy of the elements. We know who controls the elements. God is required! Therefore let us pray and give thanks to God. We need to realize more than ever that God’s blessings are reflected in our harvest. *“Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High”* (Psalm 50:14). Let this Thanksgiving holiday be more than an interim between Halloween and Christmas. Let us make much of our God who is worthy to be praised. Take time this Thanksgiving Day as a day to reverence who God is, what He has done, what He does and what He will do if we trust Him, obey Him and above all, love Him with all our hearts and soul.

- Pastor Pope -

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