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Sermon Notes

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## **Fruitful and Blessed; Barren and Cursed**

### **Hebrews 6:7-12**

Our God does unsearchable wonders, beyond all possible human comprehension. According to Job 5, one of those wonders is the miracle of rain:

*Job 5:9-10 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. <sup>10</sup> He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside.*

John Piper wrote an incredible meditation on this passage from Job...

**Is rain a great and unsearchable wonder wrought by God? Picture yourself as a farmer in the Near East, far from any lake or stream. A few wells keep the family and animals supplied with water. But if the crops are to grow and the family is to be fed from month to month, water has to come on the fields from another source. From where?**

**Well, the sky. The sky? Water will come out of the clear blue sky? Well, not exactly. Water will have to be carried in the sky from the Mediterranean Sea, over several hundred miles and then be poured out from the sky onto the fields. Carried? How much does it weigh? Well, if one inch of rain falls on one square mile of farmland during the night, that would be 27,878,400 cubic feet of water, which is 206,300,160 gallons, which is 1,650,501,280 pounds of water.**

**That's heavy. So how does it get up in the sky and stay up there if it's so heavy? Well, it gets up there by evaporation. Really? That's a nice word. What's it mean? It means that the water sort of stops being water for a while so it can go up and not down. I see. Then how does it get down? Well, condensation happens. What's that? The water starts becoming water again by gathering around little dust particles between .00001 and .0001 centimeters wide. That's small.**

**What about the salt? Salt? Yes, the Mediterranean Sea is salt water. That would kill the crops. What about the salt? Well, the salt has to be taken out. Oh. So the sky picks up a billion pounds of water from the sea and takes out the salt and then carries it for three hundred miles and then dumps it on the farm?**

Well it doesn't dump it. If it dumped a billion pounds of water on the farm, the wheat would be crushed. So the sky dribbles the billion pounds water down in little drops. And they have to be big enough to fall for one mile or so without evaporating, and small enough to keep from crushing the wheat stalks.

How do all these microscopic specks of water that weigh a billion pounds get heavy enough to fall (if that's the way to ask the question)? Well, it's called coalescence. What's that? It means the specks of water start bumping into each other and join up and get bigger. And when they are big enough, they fall. Just like that? Well, not exactly, because they would just bounce off each other instead of joining up, if there were no electric field present. What? Never mind. Take my word for it.

I think, instead, I will just take Job's word for it. I still don't see why drops ever get to the ground, because if they start falling as soon as they are heavier than air, they would be too small not to evaporate on the way down, but if they wait to come down, what holds them up till they are big enough not to evaporate? Yes, I am sure there is a name for that too. But I am satisfied now that, by any name, this is a great and unsearchable thing that God has done. I think I should be thankful - lots more thankful than I am.

God is the only one who can send rain... it is to His glory to open His hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing... and one of the ways He does this is with rain

In Hebrews 6, the Author speaks of the blessings of a land receiving the consistent rain from heaven and that produces a harvest useful for the farmer:

***Hebrews 6:7-12 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.***

He also speaks of land that drinks in the same rain from God and produces nothing but thorns and thistles:

***<sup>8</sup> But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.***

These two outcomes are meant to give us a sense of two different responses to the Gospel and the ongoing ministry of the Word of God...

Some people hear the word, believe it, and by perseverance produce a rich harvest to the glory of God

Other people hear the word, do not believe it, and do not produce a good harvest...

These two outcomes are the focus of this sermon

Context: The Author to Hebrews is writing to Jewish people who had made an outward profession of faith in Christ and testified to it by water baptism; but now, under immense pressure from their Jewish family members, neighbors, religious leaders, and political leaders, they were being tempted to reject Jesus Christ and go back to Old Covenant Judaism.

The Author has responded by showing the superiority of Christ to all the Old Testament prophets, to the angels who brought the Old Covenant, to Moses who was Mediator of the Old Covenant, to Joshua who brought the Jews into the Promised Land, and to Aaron, the Great High Priest...

Jesus is infinitely SUPERIOR to all of these!!

The Author is also giving consistent warnings to these Jewish professors of faith in Christ that they must PERSEVERE in the Christian life, they must NOT BE LIKE their Jewish ancestors who heard the promises of God at the time of the Exodus and who yearned to return to Egypt and to slavery:

***“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...”***

They must fight the hardening effects of sin on their hearts and keep running this race with endurance right to the end

So, we have today two different scenarios: a fruitful land that is blessed by God, and a barren land that is cursed by God...

With that we have a sweet pastoral encouragement that God is not unjust and will never forget any of our faith-filled loving service to Him and to His people

And finally, we have a strong exhortation to not be LAZY but to imitate those who by faith and patience inherit what has been promised: the TRUE PROMISED LAND of eternity in heaven

## I. Fruitful Land is Blessed by God (vs. 7)

***Hebrews 6:7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.***

### A. The Land

1. The Author of Hebrews is using a verbal image... perhaps a metaphor or an extended parable, in the agricultural realm

2. Clearly, he is talking about people and their relationship with God... and not just any people, but “the people of God”, the people God had called out to be His own possession
3. Consistently in Scripture, the “land” as a parable refers to the Jews, the nation of Israel
4. The clearest parallel here is with Isaiah’s “Parable of the Vineyard” in Isaiah 5 in which the Jews are likened to a vineyard which the Lord planted and richly provided for, but which in the end produced only bad grapes... and he was bitterly disappointed with the harvest
5. The Jews, then, are directly in view here... and they may be divided into two categories: fruitful and unfruitful
  - a. Fruitful: those who, believing and obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ, brought forth the fruits of repentance, faith, and daily obedience
    - i) They were continually blessed by the ongoing effusion of the Holy Spirit
    - ii) They continually brought forth fruit in keeping with repentance... good works that glorified God in the name of Christ
  - b. Unfruitful: of TWO SORTS again
    - i) Those who were hardened against Jesus and who vigorously rejected the gospel outright; they were obstinate unbelievers
    - ii) Those who were hypocritical apostates... who initially embraced the gospel of Christ and made an outward profession, but who eventually rejected Jesus and fell away to their old lives
6. HOWEVER: though the Jews are initially in view here in light of the unfolding of God’s redemptive plan, the Gentiles themselves will eventually fit into those same two categories: fruitful and unfruitful

#### B. The Rain Often Falling

1. The heavenly blessings of God enabling the land to produce its fruit
2. Rain consistently presented as evidence of God’s special powers over the earth... something God does, and something ONLY God can do; evidence also of God’s special love and care for the world and all its people, even the evil as well as the good

***Job 36:27-31 "He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; <sup>28</sup>  
the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. <sup>29</sup>***

*Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion? <sup>30</sup> See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea. <sup>31</sup> This is the way he governs the nations and provides food in abundance.*

*Matthew 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

*Deuteronomy 28:12 The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands.*

*Zechariah 10:1 Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone.*

Jeremiah says that no one but the Lord our God has the power to send rain... the idols certainly cannot do it:

*Jeremiah 14:22 Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, O LORD our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this.*

3. Apart from God's direct action on the land, it will produce nothing... the rain must fall
  - a. The Greek word for "rain" here refers to a gentle wetting shower, perfect for growing
  - b. It does not refer to a driving rain or storm that flattens a harvest
4. The words "often falling" refers to a people consistently under ongoing blessings of God, nourishing it and sustaining it for fruitfulness
  - a. The Promised Land was singled out for mention on this one issue... it regularly drank in the rain from heaven

*Deuteronomy 11:10-12 The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. <sup>11</sup> But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. <sup>12</sup> It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.*

- b. God doesn't bless His people with just one taste of heavenly rain... one light drizzle and then that's it!!
- c. Rather God OFTEN pours out His love on His people, even if they are not responding with the fruitfulness they should demonstrate!!

- d. God knows better than we do how consistently the land must be watered in order to be fruitful... and He is lavishly gracious in providing for the land what it needs to be fruitful... so also God knows what His people need by way of the Holy Spirit and the Word in order to be spiritually fruitful

5. The rain symbolizes BOTH the Holy Spirit and the Word of God

- a. The Word is like rain

***Deuteronomy 32:2 Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.***

***Isaiah 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, <sup>11</sup> so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.***

The Word of God is like rain in that it descends from above, giving life and refreshing the soul...

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is specifically like rain, bringing eternal life and fruitfulness

- b. The Holy Spirit is like rain

***Isaiah 44:3-4 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. <sup>4</sup> They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.***

- c. SO... the rain often falling refers to the ongoing ministry of the Word of God by the power of the Spirit

6. In this context: the Hebrew Church had been richly blessed by both the Holy Spirit and the ongoing ministry of the Apostolic Word... they had been saturated with BOTH effusions and had every opportunity to be fruitful

***Hebrews 2:3-4 This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. <sup>4</sup> God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.***

7. This land “***drank in*** the rain often falling on it”... it pictures a THIRSTY land, ready and yearning for the heavenly rain; it represents eager, thirsty hearts that had absorbed the ministry of the word and the Spirit... the spiritual rain had soaked into the good soil... it penetrated their hearts and moved them to obedience

C. The Crop

1. The Greek is literally **βοτάνην** from which we get the word “botany”; “herbs” or any green growing thing... it is a general term for the plants of the field used in Genesis 1:11-12

***Genesis 1:11-12 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.***

2. This crop is said to be “useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated...”
  - a. The hardworking farmer expects to eat of the harvest... he desires to feed his family with the fruits of his labor
  - b. He has no use for thorns and thistles... they are worthless to him; he desires USEFUL plants... and when the harvest comes, the farmer smiles and is deeply satisfied with his labors... he blesses the land in his heart, saying “This is good, rich soil... I am delighted to live here”
  - c. The word “useful” = suitable, profitable, giving benefit to the farmer
3. Meaning: the crops represent GOOD WORKS done by these people... the harvest of righteousness, the fruit of praise to God, the harvest of actions which build the Kingdom: evangelism, discipleship, prayer, generosity to the poor and needy

***Hebrews 6:10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.***

- a. The “work” of verse 10 = whatever was done to help His people in their distress
- b. The use of spiritual gifts that help Jesus’ people grow
- c. Sacrificial acts of generosity to the poor and needy
- d. The giving of physical help to persecuted saints who were in prison
- e. The courageous witness to the persecutors...

#### D. The Blessing of God

1. The Author says such a fruitful soil receives the “blessing of God”
2. We can take that in two senses
  - a. Blessed NOW... with even more resources

- i) God, well-pleased with the return on His investment, pours even more resources into this fruitful life
- ii) He will open up their hearts more and more, show them more and more of His word by the power of His Spirit
- iii) He will bless them with more and more responsibilities in His church
- iv) He will draw more and more fruitfulness from such people... they are receiving the “blessing of God”

b. Blessed in HEAVEN

- i) The blessings of a RICH WELCOME into heaven
- ii) The blessing of PRAISE FROM GOD: “Well done, you good and faithful servant...”

E. This is the TRUE CHRISTIAN LIFE!!! The HARVEST IS EVERYTHING

1. A life of consistent blessings from God’s Word and God’s Spirit
2. The noble and eager heart that takes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and brings forth a harvest: one hundred, ninety, or sixty times what was sown
3. Every true believer in Christ produces fruit for God’s glory... this is CONSISTENTLY TAUGHT

SADLY... by contrast, we have:

II. Barren Land is Cursed by God (vs. 8)

***Hebrews 6:8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.***

A. The Total Focus: What Was the Harvest

1. The Author does not speak of the rain falling often on this land, though it is implied that it does initially
2. RATHER: the focus is on what the outcome is... the harvest is NOTHING USEFUL
3. The “thorns and thistles” of course hearkens back to the curse on the ground as a result of human sin

***Genesis 3:17-18 Cursed is the ground because of you.... It will produce thorns and thistles for you...***



## B. The Assessment of the Land: Worthless

1. The land is like the harvest: they are both worthless
2. The Greek word means literally “not approved” or “rejected”; God has studied both their works and their hearts... he has known the soil of their hearts was evil toward him, and he has studied the actual outcome of their lives:
  - a. Their works were hypocritical and self-serving at best; they were actively evil at worst
  - b. If they gave to the poor and needy, or if they ministered spiritual gifts to the Body of Christ, it was not for love for others or for the glory of Christ... but rather for self-serving reasons: either as Judas, they were helping themselves to the money bag while pretending to care for the poor; OR their secret works were evil as well... doing shameful things in the dark when no one could see them
  - c. The works prove the nature of their hearts: both the works and the heart that produced them were WORTHLESS in God’s sight

## C. The Danger of the Land: Cursing

1. The Author says this worthless land is “close to cursing” or “in danger of being cursed”
2. The curse is God’s pronouncement upon them, and it carries both a PRESENT and a FUTURE sense
  - a. At present,
    - i) the curse is obvious at one level: barrenness... utter fruitlessness; they are frustrated and fruitless in their lives, bearing nothing of value for Jesus

***Matthew 21:19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, [Jesus] went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.***

- ii) Also NOW... God may increasingly withhold the blessings of the Word and the Spirit from them:

***Deuteronomy 11:17 Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.***

***Isaiah 5:6 I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it."***

- iii) In other words, one curse is that God will withhold the influences of the word of God on their lives
- iv) They will not hear faithful preaching or teaching of the word... perhaps they will be disciplined by a church, or choose to depart a church where the word of God IS being faithfully preached and they will go instead to a church where the gospel is NOT faithfully preached; this will have the effect of hardening their hearts even more

b. In the future: the curse will come on Judgment Day

***Matthew 25:41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.***

D. The End of the Land: Burning

***"... in the end, it will be burned."***

1. The language of burning is a consistent picture of condemnation by God on Judgment Day
2. Again and again, it speaks of the agonies of eternal fire

***Revelation 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. <sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***

E. Consistent Biblical Lesson: God Demands Fruitfulness from His People

1. This is one of the most common themes in the Bible: genuine faith produces good fruit
2. Conversely, by our fruit, our harvest, God will identify us

***Matthew 3:8, 10 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.... The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.***

***Matthew 7:16-20 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad***

*tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*

**Matthew 12:33** *"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.*

3. Many parables have fruit as the point

- a. The Parable of the Vineyard: the tenants are judged because they refused to give the harvest back to the master

**Matthew 21:43** *"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.*

b. The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

**Luke 13:6-9** *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' <sup>8</sup> "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"*

- c. The Wheat and the Tares: the work of the devil is proven by the harvest... the wheat sprouted and formed heads, and showed themselves to be different from the wheat
- d. And especially the seed and the soils: the good soil produced a good crop: 100, 90, 60 times what was sown; the seed on the path, in rocky soil, or among the thorns produced NO HARVEST

4. The Vine and the Branches

**John 15:5-8** *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

- a. This is a profoundly relevant cross-reference!!
- b. True disciples of Jesus produce GOOD FRUIT...
- c. Jesus said: Any branch "IN ME" that bears no fruit is thrown away and withers... there's the curse IN THIS LIFE; such branches are picked up

and thrown into the fire and burned: there's the curse and condemnation on Judgment Day

- d. Jesus also said by abiding in Him we will bear MUCH fruit and prove ourselves to be His disciples
- e. Without fruit, you are NO DISCIPLE of Jesus

### III. Pastoral Encouragement: God Will Not Forget Your Love (vs. 9-10)

***Hebrews 6:9-10 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case-- things that accompany salvation. <sup>10</sup> God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.***

### IV. Pastoral Exhortation: Don't Get Lazy (vs. 11-12)

***Hebrews 6:11-12 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. <sup>12</sup> We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.***

### V. Applications

#### A. Come to Christ!!

1. The harvest these passages speak about is only possible through faith in Christ
2. Jesus came as a man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross under the wrath of God for our sins
3. Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day...
4. By faith in Christ, all your sins will be wiped away!! They will be removed from you as far as the east is from the west!! They will be dropped into the deepest part of the ocean
5. AND by continually ABIDING in Christ you will bear much fruit; by soaking in the sweet rain of the Word of God and the life-giving Spirit of God, you will be able to produce a marvelous HARVEST of RIGHTEOUSNESS for the glory of God
  - a. Every sermon you hear will soak into your thirsty heart
  - b. Every seed of truth will be well-watered and fertilized and will produce some good fruit for the glory of God
  - c. You will have a rich sense of the blessing of God on your life

## B. Assess Your Harvest

1. This passage is given to warn us and exhort us to fruitfulness in Jesus
2. Is there a rich harvest of the word of God in your life?
3. Do you see the FRUIT that God says He is looking for from you?
4. Heart Fruit
  - a. Hunger for the WORD of GOD... eager receptiveness of the word as displayed by an eagerness to hear good preaching and teaching; a hunger displayed in your daily quiet time... taking in the Word of God day after day
  - b. Growing FAITH in God... stronger and stronger sense of His presence in your life; a strong sense of the reality of invisible spiritual things; a growing and active trust in Jesus for everything in your life
  - c. Deep LOVE for God, for Jesus: affection for Him, attraction to Him above all things... yearning to please Him in every way; Deep love also for the PEOPLE of GOD (more on that next week)... seeking to help them, and to serve them and love them along their way; a MIND SET on the things of God... thinking consistently about Jesus and His promises, thinking consistently about the word of God; EMOTIONS appropriate for the Christian life... rejoicing when you hear of someone else's salvation; deeply grieved when you hear of someone else's suffering or sin; in general, the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT:

***Galatians 5:22-23 ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control***

ASSESS YOURSELVES: do you see this kind of INTERNAL FRUIT in your life?

### 5. Lifestyle Fruit

- a. A consistent pattern of obedience to the commands of God by the power of the Holy Spirit:
- b. You read the Scripture, see that He wants you to do certain things and not do certain other things...
  - i) He wants you to be faithful in prayer: do you pray???
  - ii) He wants you to be generous with your tithes and offerings... do you give???

- iii) He wants you to be active in sharing your faith... do you share your faith???
- iv) He wants you to put sin to death by the power of the Spirit: lust, evil desires, greed, selfishness, laziness, pride... are you in daily, active battle against the deeds of the flesh
- v) He wants you to guard your mouth and not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs... DO YOU GUARD YOUR SPEECH??
- vi) He wants you to live openly and fully for His glory moment by moment by the power of the Holy Spirit
- vii) He wants you to be faithfully confessing sin to Him, knowing that this Christian life is IMPOSSIBLE to live apart from His power... He wants you daily to come to the throne of grace and receive mercy and forgiveness for your transgressions... DO YOU KEEP SHORT ACCOUNTS with God?

Dear friends, do you see this kind of fruit in you and growing more and more?

Do not be deceived!! A faith that produces no fruit is DEAD says James!

If you sow to the Spirit, from the Spirit you will reap eternal life... if you sow to the flesh, from the flesh you will reap destruction.

Hebrews 6:7-8 stands over us and beckons us to look at the harvest of our lives... so that if it is lacking we may repent and produce fruit in keeping with repentance while there is still time.