

From Seeds to Fruit

A drash on parashah 22; Vayak'hel
by Oriyan Phipps

“Moshe summoned B'tzal'el, Oholi'av and every craftsman to whom Adonai had given wisdom, everyone whose heart stirred him, to come and take part in the work. They received from Moshe all the offering which the people of Isra'el had brought for the work of the sanctuary. But they still kept bringing voluntary offerings every morning, until all the craftsmen doing the work for the sanctuary left the work they were involved with to tell Moshe, “The people are bringing far more than is needed to do the work Adonai has ordered done.” So Moshe gave an order which was proclaimed throughout the camp:

“Neither men nor women are to make any further efforts for the sanctuary offering.” In the way, the people were restrained from making additional contributions. For what they had already was not only sufficient for doing all the work, but too much!” - **Shemot (Exo.) 36:2-7**

I read this and think, wow! These people had something or knew something I don't think I have ever had in my life. I don't think I've ever witnessed it either. Then I realize that Isra'el rarely exhibited this sort of devotion to God either. This makes me feel better. Then I feel God telling me that this sort of passion and devotion is only a taste of what is actually available to us. This idea blows my mind. Even what I read here seems unattainable, let alone more! This is when God says, “Study more. It's in there”

O.K., then let's go to the Brit Hadashah portion, which is 2 Corinthians 9. (for the sake of space I won't write it here, but will paraphrase it) The Believers in Corinth are eager to prepare a gift for the Believers in Macedonia. Shaul is excited about their enthusiasm in preparing this gift, but wants to make sure it is ready for them when they arrive. He gives some advice concerning how to prepare the gift, as well as the expected blessings from God for preparing the gift.

There is a familiar phrase from this passage that reads, “God loves a cheerful giver.” This is another one of those passages which we rarely see the context it is found in. I can almost guarantee that if you have heard a teaching on this passage it was misapplied.

There is a doctrine out there which has been called the “prosperity gospel”, among other things. This says basically that God loves you and wants the best for you. If you lack wealth or health it is because you lack the faith to proclaim and claim the promises of prosperity and goodness God has given in His Word. Not only is this not truth, but it doesn't fit with reality. If it did happen, everyone would believe in God, just to live in a big mansion with a BMW or something like that in the driveway. God does not want us loving Him for what we get out of it. He wants us to love Him because of Him. Wealth is not always a good thing. The times when Isra'el rebelled the most was when they were in times of goodness. There are plenty of lottery winners which prove that wealth can destroy your life if it is not managed properly. This passage is not intended to be a proof text of promised prosperity for faith in Him. Certainly there are blessings

and riches we all obtain for obedience, but most of them are treasures, which we lay in heaven, not necessarily here on earth.

Another misconception is how we think of this passage when it comes to the concept of giving. I think for most of us, any teaching on giving or tithing is uncomfortable. We immediately put our focus on our back pocket or our purse and either think, “Here’s another religious person trying to get my money”, or we feel guilty for our lack of giving or the ability to do so. Shaul never says anything about money in this passage. We don’t really know what the nature of this gift is. He never says, “I am going to pass around some Kentucky Fried Chicken buckets and I want all of you to dig deep and give what you can. We want to fill these buckets up.” I don’t think this passage really has anything directly to do with money, tithing, or providing this gift from their own wallets.

Just like the parashah, God is teaching us passion. He is teaching us how to give from our heart, not our wallet. Shaul uses a familiar image of his day, that of sowing and reaping, to describe how the Corinthians were to prepare this gift. Sowing is the planting of seeds, and reaping is the bringing in of the harvest after the seeds grow. There is a great period of time in the middle, which farmers in that day had little control over. Whether they had a good crop or a bad crop depended on the weather, which is why every culture attributed religious connections, and the appeasement of the gods to the growth of crops. Crops need proper amounts of light and water to grow properly. I think this is one of the reasons Yeshua said He was the Light of the World. He also said He was the living water, or “mayim chayim”. We plant seeds in the soil of our lives, then Yeshua is what makes those seeds grow, so we can bring in a harvest, not only for our needs but others.

What seeds am I talking about? Love your neighbor as yourself. Have concern for the poor and fatherless amongst you. These and other commands from Torah are the seeds which produce a spirit of generosity in our lives. What is the harvest?

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self control. **[Gal.5:22]**

We talk a lot about things like love, joy, and peace, but what are these things apart from Torah? It is Torah which defines and produces these concepts in a Biblically correct way. Otherwise we think of these things in the terms of the world. We talk about other concepts like truth, righteousness, and the Word of God, but again, these things are fruits whose roots are grown from the seeds of Torah.

A field with plenty of sun and water, but no seeds is just a field of mud. A field of seeds with little or no sun or water is a field with lifeless seeds or plants which began to grow and soon died. Either way there is no fruit and there is no harvest. He who plants sparingly, reaps sparingly.

When we think of the concept of giving, if our attention automatically goes to our wallet, we are trying to have a harvest without planting seeds first and allowing those seeds to grow in the light and water of Yeshua. This is why it can be such a stressful contemplation. If we live in

obedience to God's Torah, out of our sincere love for Him, then we realize that all we have has been given to us by God. Isra'el gave of their possessions for the building of the tabernacle because of the possessions God gave them when they left Egypt. Their offering was not so much coming out of their own wealth, but God's. In the same way, our giving is not so much coming from our wallet, as God's wallet, and He has a big wallet!

I've been faced with two friends who have been in need in the last couple of months. When the needs came about, I prayed, and looked for any way I could to help them. The first friend, I had the ability to help myself. The second friend had a need I could do nothing about. I felt helpless, with the exception of prayer. What I didn't realize was that my sincere desire itself was planting seeds of Torah, and I didn't need the money in my wallet, because I was accessing God's wallet. My friend got the help he needed in other ways, some of them quite miraculous, and God continues to bless him and his family. The first friend also received blessings beyond what I was able to give.

We can go to a store and see some nice new wide screen tv, or something else that catches our eye, and search our brain for what we can do to get this thing of the world that we want. I'm not going to say that this in itself is wrong, but we need to learn to get just as passionate about the things God cares about. The problem isn't what we have or don't have, but where our priorities are. This is what Torah teaches us to do.

As we learn to plant the seeds of Torah in our life and allow these seeds to grow in the light and water of Yeshua, we learn how to tap into the resources and power of God. Some wonder why we don't see the kinds of miracles today that we see in the Bible. I think it is because the seeds of Torah are not being sown in order to reap a harvest of such miracles. As we draw closer to the end times, however, I believe those who are faithful to both the written and living Torah's will see more supernatural powers and miracles, but the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit will not come if the seeds of Torah have not been planted first.

We live as finite beings in a world of limitations. Though we don't like the limitations at times, the absence of such limitations can be very scary. Kefa/Peter experienced this when he walked on water with Yeshua. This is something which humanly speaking is impossible, yet he did it. At first, I'm sure there was excitement in doing something humanly impossible, but this excitement quickly turned into fear when he realized what exactly he was doing and the dangers involved. In other words, he began to focus on his abilities rather than God's. However, the supernatural is only super until it happens on a regular basis. If Kefa went out and walked with Yeshua every day on the water, the fear would go away, and walking on water would become just as natural as walking on the beach, only it would feel better. Some day we will be in the Kingdom and walking on a beach with Kefa who will invite us to go fishing. We will say, "Sure, where's your boat?" Kefa will laugh, "What boat?"

The gift the Corinthians was preparing for was going to bring great glory to God. In order to accomplish this most effectively, it would have to actually come from God Himself. The harvest was His, and his people, both the givers and the receivers reaped the benefits of it. The preparations the Corinthians did was the planting of the seeds for God to use to grow His harvest from. We are impressed by the gifts of the Corinthians as well as the Israelites in the

parashah, however the same harvest, and much more is available to us as we plant the seeds of Torah in our lives. The size and nature of the harvest is according to God's will, but the harvest will still be in proportion to what we sow. God, in His grace has done some amazing things in the world through the 5 or 6 seeds planted by the church at any given time. How much more would God accomplish through His people if closer to 613 seeds are planted and nurtured by the light and water of Yeshua? I don't know for sure, but I am sure we will all begin to find out as we draw closer to the end times.

God loves a cheerful giver. When looking at the Greek with a Hebraic understanding, I think it can be understood as this. God loves a giver who gives out of the grace of God. This is a giver that gives out of the resources of God, not his own. In so doing, God increases our "tzadakah", which is generally translated charity. Literally it means righteousness. This has little to do with money, and everything to do with drawing closer to God. This must be our focus, and when it is, we see that the seeds we plant serve to add to our righteousness, so let's get into Torah and plant as many seeds we can to see the harvest God will produce.