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FREE!

GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

RIPE FRUIT

By Ron Allen

One of the most pleasant sensations I know of is the smell of a green-grocer's store. There is something totally delightful in the aroma of fresh vegetables, the scent of newly-pulled carrots, the refreshing whiff of celery mingled with the exotic fragrances of herbs. All of this, with the enticing waftings of apples, mangoes and the delicious bouquet of strawberries.

In addition to this agreeable odor, there is the visual joy of the color of the produce in all its array. The sheer display confirms what is already known by the nostrils—that this nutritional collective has arrived at its destiny; it is ready to be eaten. Those months in the earth, taking in moisture and minerals, with sunlight working its magic to produce sumptuous flavors are now justified on chopping boards, in pots and pans, and finally, on eager palates everywhere.

The unrelenting drive toward ripeness and harvest, so

familiar in the natural world, is taken up in Scripture as a metaphor for human life. Israel is called "God's vine; his pleasant plant" (Isaiah 5:7). The believer is said to be like "a tree planted beside streams of water that yields its fruit in season" (Psalm 1:3). Jesus adopted the same imagery, but recast it to suit his message.

"I am the vine, you are the branches," he told his disciples. *"If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5).*

More examples of growth and fruitfulness illustrating human life may be cited from Scripture. One of them occurs in the prophecy of Amos:

This is what the sovereign Lord showed me: a basket of ripe fruit.

"What do you see, Amos?" he asked. "A basket of ripe fruit," I answered.

Then the Lord said to me, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer" (Amos 8:1-3).

This ancient text asserts that human existence is weighted with solemn consequence. Many alive on earth today no longer believe this. The steady drift away from the Judeo-Christian outlook has meant that large swathes of humanity do not think it matters at all how they live, what they do with their lives, what they produce, what they love or how they amuse themselves. Mark Twain—decent and wonderful man though he was—concluded that all human activity is destined to come to nothing anyhow.

The burden of pain, care, misery grows heavier year by year; at length ambition is dead; pride is dead; vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only un-poisoned gift earth ever had for



"God's vine; his pleasant plant" (Isaiah 5:7).

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EDITORIAL . . .

*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”
(Matthew 7:24).*

In the known universe, human beings are special. They are highly wrought, and self-conscious. This means they can think about themselves; what they are doing, evaluate, envisage and make choices about their future. The rest of the creatures are far from being able to do this. Changes occur in nature all the time; without those changes having been first considered by nature. Cause and effect push nature around. But human beings have the ability to project their minds into the future, then work to make those ideas come to pass. This is why homo sapiens—not cows or peacocks—build spaceships or perform brain surgery.

Jesus says that humans are builders—builders of themselves. Uniquely, they are significantly responsible for how their lives turn out. When we are babes, our parents take responsibility for us. As we grow up, increasingly they say things like: “Get a grip on yourself; take yourself in hand; come to your senses.” They want us to become builders of ourselves.

It is true that in many things about our existence we have no choice. Yet, there remains in each of us an element of freedom with which to ‘make our own luck.’ This freedom is

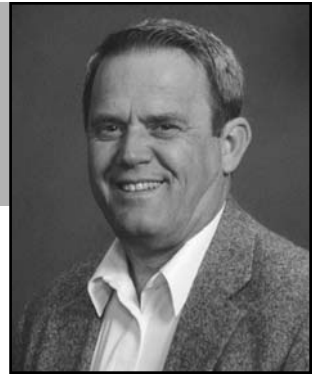
acknowledged by Jesus, and honored. His parable of the two builders takes human liberty seriously. Ultimately, my life will not be something that just happens without me having anything to do with it. God has given me a creative opportunity to make something of myself; something that will stand and not come to naught. To have a part in building one’s own life is to be involved in a great project. It invests life with dignity and high purpose.

According to Jesus, it matters how we build. There are choices to be made that can lead to catastrophe. Other values pursued result in things that last. It is possible for a person to so live that he becomes larger than life. Others bless God for him, and continue to do so long after he has left this world. On the other hand, some pass through their lives with regret, and they die un-mourned.

A building with poor foundations is likely to collapse. Jesus teaches the same is true in building a human life. It needs to be

well founded. That upon which a man centers his life, which undergirds his plans and movements, which bears on all his decisions, that is his foundation.

In the parable, Jesus presents himself as the only sure bedrock on which to found a human life. A life organized upon Jesus’ teachings, and bonded to him in friendship, is a life that will stand any test. It will never be destroyed.



Pastor Ron Allen



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them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence, where they achieved nothing, where they were a mistake, a failure and a foolishness; where they have left no sign they have ever existed—a world which will lament them a day and forget them forever.

Mark Twain's slant on life is far from being a rare perspective. But it's not hard to see how the idea does poor service for anyone in hardship; anyone struggling to do right, or to work for human betterment. What is the point when all will be dissolved?

Amos' basket of ripe fruit tells a different story. Human existence tends toward a denouement. Amos sees that the people of Israel have been living selfishly, arrogantly, cruelly; as if it was no one's business but their own what they did. Through his prophets, God has been warning them that this will come to a bad completion, simply because they are participants in a process that is causal. Development has been happening. They have been agents in the passage of civil and cultural life in a way that will certainly affect its outcome.

Everything that Israel has been doing has brought the nation to a critical moment. The growing season is over; the time of ripeness has arrived. But instead of a creditable ripeness, resulting in joy, God assures them that catastrophe is near. *"The songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many*

bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!"

My dad was a citrus grower. He enjoyed walking through his orchard when the fruit was ripe; admiring the plump roundness of the fruit, and its rich coloring. Taking his pocket knife he would pick an orange, cut open to display the juicy flesh. Then he would cut a slice for himself and for whoever

was with him at the time, and eat. Noise of gastronomic delight would follow. Sometimes he would pick a handsome specimen, cut it open only to find the inside spoiled by moth or grubs. The fruit was ripe but rotten. It had to be harvested, and then thrown out.

Amos uses a horticultural metaphor to say to Israel, "You are a crop that has come of age. But your ripeness is without benefit or gladness. It is a ripeness of decay and death.

Self-conscious life, in the biblical view, is a momentous thing. We cannot just *be*: we must to *become*. We play a decisive role in that becoming. In the fact of our development we have no choice. But what we develop into is a matter

upon which we can have a decisive influence. To live reaching for, and striving toward, God is to realize the high privilege and purpose of existence; as joyful advance toward a sure consummation replete with all the satisfactions of a feast.

-TO BE CONTINUED... 

The finer a man is, the more intensely convinced he is that he is not merely an effect but a cause, not merely a thing that is made, but a person who is deliberately making. To ignore or neglect those instinctive forces is to court disaster...

-Studdert Kennedy.

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. 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.... This is to my father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

-John 15:5-8

We are happy to announce that Ron Allen will be visiting the North American continent, courtesy of the Canadian Good News Unlimited Fellowship. The following is venue information:

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October 16-17, 2009

Good News Unlimited Fellowship
236 Finch Ave East Toronto, Ontario
Contact: David Okamura (416) 222-9281
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OUGHT

By Desmond Ford

In the little word ‘ought’ lays both our misery and our mercy, our grandeur and our despair. Wherein lays the strength and the validity of the demanding term? Does anyone truly have the right to say, “you ought” or “you ought not?” It is evidence that ‘oughts’ dominate us in our society. Even in denying their existence or authenticity, we are forced to affirm them by saying in effect that there ‘ought’ not be talk of oughts....

Interestingly enough, sometimes it is the atheists and agnostics who wax the most indignant when vice prospers or virtue is unrewarded. They are often emphatic that embezzlers, liars, oppressors should be punished. Some even impugn God for what he permits to happen. On the other hand, they deny the very existence of the deity—“I’m an atheist, thank God!”

But at this point, it is important to see that no mere *thing* can make a moral or spiritual claim over us. For this reason, Dr. Emil Brunner reminded us that “It is so much more comfortable to have a pantheistic philosophy than to believe in a Lord God. A God who is neuter makes no claims. He simply allows himself to be looked at.” It was Julian Huxley who voiced his tremendous relief on accepting atheism—now, there was no one with sufficient authority to say ‘no’ to him about anything....

Of course, it must be confessed that no one has ever seen an ‘ought’. But neither have we seen love, though we know its fruits. Nor have we seen truth, nor beauty, nor purity, though for these things men strive and die, knowing as they do so, that they “ought” so to do....

What are we saying? We are affirming that the most important things in life are the invisible, not the tangible, and

that our success and joy in this life, and in the hereafter, will be proportionate to our awareness of that fact and our right relationship to it....

Intuitively, all men know that it is insanity to believe that it does not matter whether a man has lived like the apostle Paul, or Emperor Nero. The death of one Old Testament king is recorded in these words: “He departed without being desired” (2 Chronicles 21:20). What an obituary! He who prizes diamonds over glass, and gold over sand, knows that lives also should have quality. What are the years of Methuselah compared to the deeds of Jesus? What is the donation of our life?—not its duration—that is the issue. How much shall we be missed?

-Desmond Ford. KALEIDOSCOPE OF DIAMONDS V1. pp. 23-28. 

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