

FRUITFUL – Week 6: FIRSTFRUITS

SERIES OVERVIEW/MESSAGE SETUP:

WE'RE in WEEK SIX of our SERIES: FRUITFUL

Big principle in the Bible it's easy to miss: What do you do with the FIRST FRUITS?

FIRST = PRIORITY // HONOR // SOURCE

What you do with the FIRST FRUITS shows what's in your heart. It's WORSHIP.

Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV)

9 Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;

Honor = not coerced or obligated but cheerful and grateful to give

Stewardship => It all belongs to God – I'll give an account with how I managed what He entrusted to me.

10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

There is a clear blessing attached to this heart posture.

The Bible mentions “firstfruits” many times.

There's a common theme in these verses “BRING”...“BEST”...“HOLY”

Exodus 23:19a (NIV) -- “Bring the best of the firstfruits...to the house of the Lord your God...”

Romans 11:16a (NIV) -- “If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy.”

Definition:

FIRSTFRUITS are the first and best agricultural produce of a seasonal harvest, given as an offering to God.

Thesis:

When we bring the best—FIRST—God blesses the rest.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis 4.

PASSAGE:

CONTEXT:

- They've been driven out of the Garden because of their sin.
- God restored them and told them to work the land but now they were kept from the Tree of Life.
- Remember the first thing God told Adam (and Eve) was to “Be fruitful.”
- Before long, here comes Cain and Abel.

Genesis 4:2b-9 (NIV)

2 Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.

4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of

his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Big difference: Abel brought the best portions of the first of his flock.

Cain's response is telling – very angry and downcast – ALL ABOUT his heart.

6 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

God is patient with Cain – just like He was with Adam & Eve. He warns Cain that what he chooses to do next is critically important.

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let's go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don't know,” he replied. “Am I my brother's keeper?”

BIG POINT: God knows what happened to Abel (just like He knew where Adam and Eve were hiding...), but He wants Cain to own it. Cain doesn't see himself right – all he can think about is himself.

Hebrews 11:4a (NIV) -- By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings.

“BETTER” because of the condition of his heart – faith & gratitude/WORSHIP

What we do with the FIRSTFRUITS reveals what's in our hearts.

In our world of global/local economies, we have options:

- We can digitally network for a new position while in our current role.
- We can switch careers and build side hustles.
- We can work remotely, all through the night, and on weekends.

The ancient world didn't work this way.

No matter how skilled, you couldn't make it rain or force crops to grow.

You were dependent on forces beyond your control. Israel stray to fertility gods.

We face the same issue – who is our source?

Businesses talk about produce, or products and production.

This is more than the manufacture and distribution of goods.

We can't make it rain.

APPLICATION:

Five Principles of FIRSTFRUITS

1) The Principle of Worship -- Giving Honors God

What comes first is on top. It gets the highest priority.

Because we all put something first, we all WORSHIP something.

We expect the thing we worship to fill us and make us whole.

Maturity = moving from “I have to” to “I get to.”

2) The Principle of the Tithe -- Returning What Belongs to God

Firstfruits is another name for “the tithe” – the first ten percent that belongs to God.

The tithe is easy math – it gives us a simple, clear picture whether or not we’re honoring God.

The law didn’t create the tithe, it affirmed it – Abel and Abraham did it before there was a law.

Jesus critiqued the religious leaders for the way they tithed, but He never said it passed away.

Leviticus 27:30 (NIV) -- “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.”

If you think you’re the owner – you won’t tithe.

[Address common groups: 3) Didn’t know 2) Need to be reminded 3) Fearful]

3) The Principle of Sowing and Reaping -- Generosity Produces Spiritual Harvest

We don’t honor God with our firstfruits IN ORDER to get a benefit.

But God does attach promises to this heart posture.

Another word for “fruitful” is BLESSED.

Remember, we can’t make it rain. Without rain, our seed won’t grow.

We can’t force things to grow. We work hard and do our part, but we have to trust God for His blessing.

Illustration: You can live open-handed or closed-fisted

Proverbs 11:24 (MSG) -- The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller.

4) The Principle of the Heavenly Storehouse -- Investing in What Matters for Eternity

There are sound principles – steward // tithe // budget // invest

But there’s another piece – How are you participating in God’s mission?

2 Corinthians 9:13 (NIV) -- Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

5) The Principle of True Fruitfulness -- How Does This Impact My Life?

Why does God talk about money so much? Because it makes it clear. It's tangible. You can see it. It's your heart, your posture, your disposition. Do you put God first?

There's a difference between having money and being blessed by God. Not everyone with money is blessed. When God blesses your resources, it's bigger than just having enough. It's leaving a legacy, making an impact – bearing fruit that will remain!

Proverbs 11:24-25, 28, 30 (NIV)

24 One person gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

25 A generous person will prosper;
whoever refreshes others will be refreshed . . .

28 Those who trust in their riches will fall,
but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf . . .

30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
and the one who is wise saves lives.

CLOSE:

Why are FIRSTFRUITS important?

1 Corinthians 15:20 (NIV) -- But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

How do we end this whole series?

JESUS IS OUR FIRSTFRUITS – He's the best that was given