

The Fruit of Repentance

Scripture Reading — Matthew 3:1-12

Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. — Matthew 3:10

The image of someone being cut down and thrown into the fire can sound harsh and brutal, especially in our Western culture today. We are not used to hearing a tongue-lashing such as John the Baptist spoke here, at least not in a public forum.

Yet any farmer knows that untended weeds can choke out a crop. Over the course of the growing season, weeds must be controlled relentlessly through cultivating, or perhaps with weed-killer—and sometimes they must be pulled by hand.

The call to repentance and change forms an essential part of the gospel message. Just as a conscientious farmer does not simply rest after planting good seed, so also a heart transformed by God's grace is always on the lookout for sin. The religious leaders of John's day did not practice such sin control but thought they could rest in their own goodness. But they were not producing good fruit, so John called them to repentance.

As we repent and seek relief from the weeds in our souls, God's Spirit gives new and surprising fruit. This is in line with John's command to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance."

Hard words are necessary sometimes to point us to the forgiving grace of Jesus, which keeps our soul's weeds in check and allows new fruit to grow.

Prayer

I know, Lord, that there are weeds in my soul. Help me to repent, and send your Spirit into my heart, that my life may yield a rich harvest for you. Amen.

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