

FRUITFUL TREES

We are going through Matthew 3 for awhile, looking at key principles of the kingdom of God. Right now we are camped out on the idea of trees and putting an ax to the roots of some trees. This message is the story of someone who left an old tree behind and came to the one who died for him on a tree.

Raj was dusting off his bookshelf one day and noticed a small Gideon New Testament he had received at his school in London, England two years prior at age 16. He began to read it and after a few weeks the truth about Jesus touched his heart. He looked in the phone book and randomly picked a church to call at Christmas time. The number he reached was the home of the Pastor of a local Baptist Church. Raj said that he wanted to become a Christian and the Pastor led him to the Lord. The Pastor contacted me and asked me to disciple Raj. On Dec.26, 1986 I met Raj and began to train him to be a follower of Jesus. We met almost every day for the next two weeks for Bible study and then at least once a week for several months. I still have the 3x5 cards that highlight what we discussed each time. At times I took Raj out for practical evangelism.

Before the following Easter, Raj indicated his desire to be baptized in water. I had the difficult task of going to his home and telling his parents that he wanted to be baptized as a public statement of his faith in Jesus Christ. His parents were of the Sikh religion which is predominate in their native state of Punjab in northwest India. The first words his mother coldly told me were: 'I feel like you have stolen our son'. I told her that Jesus had changed his life, not me. Later, God led me to give Raj a life scripture:

'.....they will called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of His splendor.' - Isaiah 61:3

Over the next several years I would occasionally escape the congested population and stress of living in London by going to a secluded cottage in the countryside about 1 1/2 hours away. It's quiet serenity reminded me of my upbringing in a rural farming community in Western New York State. Raj would find it a blessing too. The first time I took Raj on a retreat, he got really excited as we neared the cottage in the darkness of the night. He asked me if he could roll the car window down as he wanted to gaze at the starlit sky, something he could not do in a city filled with street lights.

At the cottage, we would sometimes sit at night for hours talking about the things of God as we watched the slow burning logs in the indoor fireplace. From the first time we met, Raj and I seemed to relate well to each other, even though I was 18 years older than he was. I used to tell him that he had a 'Ronald Reagan personality' as he was usually upbeat and positive. When Raj and I were together for fellowship and prayer, it was often like two pilot light flames converging. Whoosh! There was a greater fire of God that burned in each of us and our special unity was accompanied with boldness and power.

A few years later I moved to East London for a year to work with another church involved with church planting. After the year I felt led to come back to West London to work again in the large Indian community where Raj lived. I phoned him late in the week of my return and arranged to meet with him the following Monday night at the church where we had first met. Both of us longed to meet up again after a long absence from each other. I told him I sensed that God was going to meet with us in a special way. We met together that Monday night in the small upper prayer room and began to jointly pray in the Spirit. Soon after, the glory of God's presence came into the room and both of us went to the floor as we felt the weight of His glory among us. As we later arose, Raj shared that he had a small growth near his navel. I remembered how Jesus had cursed the fig tree and how it had withered up from the roots. Raj then agreed with me as I cursed the roots of his growth in the name (authority) of Jesus. The next day Raj happily told me that the growth was nearly gone!

God used Raj to lead his brother to Christ and in a few years later their father came to the Lord. Raj would later go to Bible School in London to prepare for ministry. In 1998, while I was in India teaching at a Bible School, I received the news that Raj's mother had received Jesus into her life! Now that was a miracle! It is not easy for a person to leave their family religion, especially at an older age. On my way back to the USA I had a day layover in London, so I had an opportunity connect with Raj and his whole family. What a joy that was! As I left their house at the end of my visit, Raj's mother warmly spoke these words to me: 'Our house is your house, you are welcome here anytime.' That would be the last time I heard her voice on this earth as she died a few years later. But I will hear her voice again when I arrive in heaven, for I know that she will be there to welcome me into her heavenly home.

Raj had become a fruitful tree who displayed the fruit of God's goodness and splendor. He was full of God's Word and Holy Spirit and his family had seen the the change in his life. Our lives will change too as we indulge in the spiritual food that God has for us to eat which is His book called the Bible. It is supernatural and full of prophecies, many of which were already fulfilled in the earthly life of Jesus. Many more will be fulfilled at his second coming. It is in the written Word of God that we discover Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. It is He who said:

'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.' - John 15:5

'If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.....obey my commands.
- John 15:7-12

A few years ago, Raj wrote and told me that he had taken a group of young guys to Scotland for a spiritual retreat. One of them asked him where he had gotten the idea for it. Raj told them this American guy used to take him on retreats. In 2009 Raj wrote to tell me that he was mentoring a young relative in the faith and was using the same notes that I had used with him 23 years before! God wants to use all of us to 'make disciples' and be fruitful trees. Sometimes Jesus needs to **dig around us** to remove things that hinder our fruitfulness - Luke 13:8. It is part of God's process to prune us and make us into fruitful trees.

