

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 27: Go and bear fruit

March 16, 2011

Growing up and living in West Texas provides many interesting and unique opportunities. On any given weekend, a person may be able to enjoy a rattlesnake roundup, ranch rodeo, demolition derby or a random dust storm. The landscape provides an array of drought resistant vegetation, which includes many shades of light green to brown grasses and our version of trees; the cedar and the mesquite.

Many people have scoffed at the West Texas landscape; but then the sun begins to sink below the horizon. The once simple and somewhat desolate land is filled with beautiful shades of pink, orange and purple. No artist can capture the majesty of the West Texas sunset, except the original artist who set the sun in motion.

Now, enough about the sentimental beauty of West Texas and on to what everyone knows is most important—Friday night football. Yes, high school football could be classified as a religion here in West Texas, and I have to admit that I tithe regularly to the stadium box office and concession stand.

I had the opportunity to be quarterback of Sterling City High School, and I still love to cheer on the local team. I can remember those Friday nights and how nervous I would get before taking the field.

My worst fear was that I may forget a play or which way to run. I am sure our coach understood our fears, and before the game we would always run through the most important plays of the week. This last minute time of preparation and my coaches encouraging words reinforced what was most important during the game and helped to calm my nerves. Once the game started, no matter how dire the situation became, I could rely on those last

parting words and instructions from my coach.

In John 15, Jesus and the disciples have begun to travel to the garden where Jesus will be arrested. The words on that walk were Jesus' final teachings to the disciples. I have to think Jesus chose the words he wanted to speak very carefully because these would be the words the disciples would have to hold onto in the dark days to come.

Jesus uses the example of a vine, branches and fruit. Simply stated, this means we must do everything we can to foster growth in our relationship with Christ so that we live our lives according to Christ's example. Believing in Christ gives us salvation, but that is only the beginning of the relationship we have with Christ. From believing in Christ, we should become followers of Christ, which is what bearing fruit means. Why would these be the words Jesus chose to teach the disciples at this pivotal time?

Jesus understands people are searching for hope, peace and meaning in their life. When he says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete," Jesus tells us how to live a fulfilled life.

The joy Jesus speaks of is found only through him. His joy transcends happiness and is not based on human emotion. Jesus' joy is found only when we remain in him and bear fruit. The joy Jesus gives brings hope to the hopeless, peace to the tormented and purpose for those searching for meaning. Some of Jesus' last words before his death were given so that our joy would be complete.

Jesus now has told the disciples how to experience true joy—remain in him and bear fruit. The next thing Jesus says helps to clarify what bearing fruit really means. Verses 12 and 13 say: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

We never will find joy if we do not love other people. I believe Jesus

experienced pure joy throughout his life because of his love for people. This joy was experienced even as Jesus gave up his life because he was giving his life out of love for you and me. The more we remain in him and grow closer to him, the more we will be able to love others.

Ironically, the world tells us that in order to find joy we need to focus on our own needs, desires and dreams. Jesus tells us when we love others as he has shown, our own joy will be complete. When I look around at all the heartbreak in the world, the evidence is overwhelming that the world's way of finding joy is a lie. We must grab hold of the truth and proclaim the truth to a world that desperately needs to find joy.

Through Christ we are able to love others as he does and live our lives so others will come to love him. I am so amazed that we have a God who desires for us to find true joy in this life.

I hope you will live your life so that your joy may be complete. Do you feel that your joy is complete? Are you loving others the way Jesus loves us? Are you living your life so others will see your love? How can you do a better job of remaining in Christ? How can you show your love for others?