Entering into a Life of Fruitfulness

These last six months have been a stressful time with "wars and rumours of wars". Even worse we see civil war and internal strife, internally displaced people and refugees. Some people have been imprisoned, expelled and stressed by the overwhelming needs of refugees. And so we could continue. Some of our workers have experienced post-traumatic stress disorders. In these circumstances, how are we to live in "rest" and see fruitfulness in our lives? What follows is a partial answer.

Paul speaks of coming to Rome, ***"In the fullness of the blessing of Christ"***. (Rom. 15:29) How often when we go to meet people we wish we were "filled with blessing" for others. We are conscious that we mostly fall short of what Paul experienced. But from his example we know that it is practically possible for all of us. I think there are number of steps we need to take in order to be, ***"filled with the blessing of Christ"*** for this is the key to a life of effectiveness and fruitfulness.

1. Admit that in our walk and experience, we fall short of being full of the capacity to bless others

We will always fall short of God's standard of absolute holiness. But I don't think we need to fall short in making His promises real and operative in our lives. What are those promises? We need to know, for they are our equipment for service. Obedience is vital in making real those promises. We can't obey God's calling on our lives unless we obtain them. This requires faith. We may believe the promises to be true in the abstract, yet we may never have made them our own.

We read in Heb. 11:33-34, ***"… who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, … were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war …."***.

We know of these promises as a privilege in prospective but not as blessings in our possession. Where are we failing? Not, I think, in not accepting the teaching of the Bible in terms of the life of faith. We fail in walking daily in the faith of what we believe. We fail to avail ourselves of God's power which alone makes such a walk possible.

What are the conditions to receive God's power? We often pray earnestly and strive to live a true life of victory over sin! But still we fall short! We fall short of faith. All weakness in life and walk is a result of weakness in faith. It is not because we are without a "call" or without "gifts" or because our circumstances are so strange. It is not for lack of trying. It is simply because we do not believe. That is why we fail. To come short in faith is to come short in all ministry. It is to fail in everything!

2. Look carefully at the consequences of coming short in faith

Look at your own personal experience. Is there a feeling of stress and strain? The yoke of the Lord Jesus is not stressful. He declares, ***"My yoke is easy"***. (Mt. 11:30). So often we make great efforts to compensate for our lack of power. We sense difficulties and problems that seem as if they are about to overwhelm us leading to a lack of joy and gladness.

The failure that follows brings with it a sense of condemnation and a terrible feeling of bondage. Discouragement and despondency fill our hearts. We relapse to a low level in our spiritual lives. We are then tempted to think that, after all, this fuller life is unrealistic – this life of triumph is an impractical myth. As we accept this, we lose our ideal. There are few things more fatal to holiness and effectiveness in the life of a 'worker' than a low ideal.

But what influence does this have on others in the team and in the ministry we are involved in? We are no longer "the salt of the earth" or the "light of the world". Being salt and light are both spiritually aggressive terms! If you have lost them, then you have relapsed into worldly conformity. Our lives are intended to be a powerful and effective force in counteracting the moral putrefaction and decay that is so prevalent everywhere.

They are intended to penetrate the spiritual darkness and guide both seekers and those who are not even asking into the way of peace and safety. [***"I have been found by those who did not seek Me; I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for Me***." Rom. 10:20]

But if the light has become dim, how can we be a power on the earth to purify, to help and to give joy? To come short in faith is to fall back into the crowd of those so taken up with their own spiritual problems and difficulties that they have no time to give for the good of others.

Then see how all this reacts on the nature and quality of our work. Some people give up ministry altogether when they become introspective and discouraged. They simply do nothing for their Master. Others, while they no longer let their light shine, still keep on struggling to do something for the Lord Jesus. But the quality of their work isn't what it was or what it might be. They become mechanical and perfunctory. It is work without fruit. They are not "fruitful" – ***"bearing fruit in every good work…."*** (Col. 1:10)

It is evident that those who are in this spiritual condition need to enter into a truer and deeper experience of the saving power of the Lord Jesus.

3. What is the power we are called to enter into?

We are to enter into the possession of God's power. This is the only power that can overcome the world, Satan and sin. If we are in it, enclosed in it, we are victorious, ***"…. who, by God's power, are being guarded/kept through faith."*** (1 Pet. 1:5). If we are continually failing then we are outside that power.

It isn't power that is a result of our efforts. To follow that thought is not to be on the path of faith. Making an effort to make yourself spiritually strong is like our earlier experience when we were seeking God by trying hard to be good – i.e. justifying ourselves – making great efforts to make ourselves righteous.

It is power that God Himself provides. It can never originate in us. It is a gift of God. 1 Cor. 1:18 says that the message of the Cross of the Lord Jesus is the power of God.

So we are privileged to enter into the enjoyment of God's rest. One very essential part of our equipment for a walk of discipleship and service is 'rest of soul'. God has not only made our hearts and given them deep longings; He has also purposed to satisfy those longings. He fills them with His own peace – a peace that passes all understanding. This is what it means to ***"enter into His rest"*** (Heb. 4:1-10). If we are habitually worried and fretful, we are clearly outside that rest. If we are busy about our own plans and projects and are worried we may not be able to carry them out, then we have not ceased from our own works (Heb. 4:10) and we are strangers to God's rest. This is a major problem for so many active 'workers'.

To enter into God's rest is not to become lazy though we must cease from "our own works". No, it means we are to become urgently occupied with His works – the works of God that He has prepared for us to walk in. (Eph. 2:10) So though we are active, God is the real worker! So we enter an entirely new plane of spiritual activity.

There is an extra benefit to this. We enter into God's own holiness. Holiness is often a very misunderstood word when compared with the New Testament teaching. Here are a few points:

Holiness is the gift of God just as truly as righteousness is the gift of God (1 Cor. 1:30).
The Lord Jesus, God's gift to us, is dwelling in us. He is our holiness. We are to be concerned with this holiness before we consider the full work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Lord Jesus is God's gift of holiness to us and so we are not to be occupied with the process of becoming holy.

Nothing is more damaging to our spiritual life than concentrating our thoughts on subjective processes. It is so easy to allow subjective feelings of the work and of the Holy Spirit in our hearts

and lives to occupy our thoughts. The Holy Spirit is our sanctifier. He makes real in practice our being able to ***"share in His holiness"***. (Heb. 12:10)

So these three great factors form our spiritual equipment:

God's power

God's rest

God holiness

They can be summed up in the phrase, ***"the fullness of the blessings of Christ"***. So how do we enter into this "fullness"? It is not by spiritual growth but by faith! It is an act rather than a process. It is not by hard disciplined effort, but by simply trusting God's promises. Of necessity it is not by slow degrees but by a step of faith. This means letting go of everything that hinders faith. Such hindrances may not be sinful or wrong in themselves, but they are wrong for anyone who clings to them, who argues with God about their value in God's work and who feels unwilling to part with them. Our real problem lies not in the things/issues clung to, but in the will that refuses to let them go.

We enter into rest when we commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus to accomplish what we have failed to do ourselves. We had to do this when we were seeking the forgiveness of our sin and acceptance as a child of God. We couldn't make ourselves righteous, so we committed ourselves to God – very conscious of our unworthiness – and trusted the Lord Jesus to do it. And he did by revealing Himself to us as ***"the Lord our righteousness"***.

So now we cannot make ourselves holy. The best thing we can do is to commit the whole matter into His hands as He reveals to us that He is our holiness – our indwelling fountain of all purity. In faith we step out trusting completely the faithfulness of God. ***"He who calls us is faithful; He will surely do it."*** (I Thess. 5:24)

So don't wait. Commit yourself to Him and believe that He has taken you into His divine keeping. Demonstrate the quality of your faith by praising Him for His faithfulness. ***"For we who have believed enter that rest."*** (Heb. 4:3)