

The Vine

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us to turn once again to the Gospel of John, chapter 15, reading the beginning of that chapter. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. And as we look at this portion of John's Gospel, we find it contains very much that portion of God's Word which was conducted by Christ in the upper room.

There is that particular experience that the disciples went through during those last hours before the Lord Jesus Christ was taken away and unjustly accused and eventually condemned and crucified. But it's here from chapter 12 and 13 through to 18 that we find some of the most magnificent aspects of Christ teaching to his disciples before he is taken away to be crucified.

[1 : 52] We find there in chapter 13 the Lord displaying in a very practical way that he had come to serve and not to be served.

He engages in the foot washing of his disciples' feet. He reveals to them that one of their number is going to betray him.

He gives them a new commandment. And he also tells them in chapter 14 that he is in going away. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you, but I go to prepare a place for you.

So he is telling them at this stage, displaying first of all, his example of service to those whom he has trained to be his followers and those who will conduct his ministry after he is no longer there.

[3 : 04] He does so in the washing of the feet. Then he tells them the trials they are going to go through, the betrayal of Judas, one of their number. He gives them a new commandment, how they should love one another.

He displays or explains to them in a very real way the coming death that he is going to experience, and the giving of the spirit which eventually came true on the day of Pentecost.

And it's all being taken place in the upper room. In the first chapter 14, he says, rise, let us go from here.

Or sometimes we hear it said, rise, let us go hence. And they leave the upper room. It's the middle of the Passover.

Jerusalem is crowded with people from all parts of the Roman Empire. They've all come from north, south, east and west. And they're there in Jerusalem.

[4 : 13] And there's a certain expectancy in Jerusalem this particular Passover season. There's always a sense of expectancy, maybe the Messiah will come. But there's a heightened sense that the Messiah will come on this Passover.

And so there's very much this sense of that Christ is going to come, that realizing that he is here. But they have denied him and they have gone their own way.

And so he leads them from that upper room out to the Garden of Gethsemane.

And as I said, he tells them that he's going to go away. One day he will return. And in the meantime, he is going to send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to be with them and to guide them and to educate them and to lead them along the way of life.

And so the Lord leads the way from the upper room. He is going to a place he often went with his disciples.

[5 : 22] We know he often went there because in the Gospel of John, chapter 20, in fact it is, we are told that Judas knew of that place.

That's how he could take the conspirators with him as he went there to betray the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter 18.

Chapter 18, not chapter 20.

Now Jesus, when Jesus has spoken these words, he went out to his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden which he and his disciples entered.

Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place where Jesus often met there with his disciples. So when Jesus and the disciples were in Jerusalem, that's where they would go.

[6 : 27] That was their place of prayer meeting. Not in the upper room or in the crowded city, but they went to the garden where there was a special place for them, where they would engage in prayer, when the Lord would lead them in prayer to the throne of grace.

And so they leave, as I said, the upper city. They make their way through the back streets of Jerusalem, not wanting to be involved with the crowds who were there.

They make their way out through the walls, through one of the many walls that surround Jerusalem.

They walk along the terraces that surround Jerusalem, and along those terraces where the vines grow, that's where the Lord stops to make this final parable known to them.

It's a revelation of his own understanding of what their life is going to mean and how they should learn to bear fruit for him along life's journey.

So you can picture them using their torches as they make their way out of a bright city into the darkened valley of Jehoshaphat, across the Kidron Valley, and then up into the Garden of Gethsemane.

[7 : 55] Those of you who have been perhaps to Jerusalem, you know outside the walls of Jerusalem today, there are many, many graves and tombs, all by the followers of Muhammad, who have chosen to bury their dead along that wall.

On the opposite hill, on the Mount of Olives, there are the graves of the Jews. There's a whole field there. You remember many years ago now, John Maxwell, one of the money barons that used to be in the UK decided to be buried in that place.

And so you find these two different graves, one against the wall and one on the Mount of Olives.

And also on that Mount of Olives, you have the place where they call Dominus Fleuit, the place where Jesus wept, and also the Church of Many Nations, which is the site where it is supposed that the Garden of Gethsemane was centred and the rock upon which Christ himself is supposed to have torn himself down and prayed.

And we can imagine the Lord stopping, as I said, on the way to Gethsemane. He's walking along the terraces where the vines are growing, and he reaches down to a vine branch and gives them one last word of instruction, the last bit of instruction that he is going to give them.

It's interesting to note that what the Lord is going to speak to them about. He's not going to leave them some master plan as to what they should do when he is gone.

[9 : 43] He is not leaving them a farewell letter, but what he's holding in his hand is a vine. But what is a vine?

Well, in the Middle East, and also on the continent, if you were to go there in the winter, if you're looking at a vineyard, all you would see would be stumps of wood growing out of the ground, like perhaps a rose that's been trimmed back for the winter.

No growth looking as though it's dead and nothing is ever going to grow from it again. But that is the precious bit for the vinedresser. In the spring, in the growing season, that vine begins to shed forth shoots and it begins to grow.

And as it grows, it grows along the terraces. They have what you call trellises on which they tie the vines.

And in the spring, as I said, when the sap rises from the stump, shoots begin to appear and leaves begin to appear along its branches.

[11 : 00] And as the Lord says, I am the vine. He is the root through which the sap comes and through which all the goodness is going to flow to the branches of the vine.

I am the vine. From me all the strength and goodness that flows to the rest of the plant comes. My father is the vinedresser.

In the same way as in the parable of the sower and the seed, or the sower and the soil, should I say, there is the father is the one who changes or prepares the soil.

We can have different types of soil, the stony ground that falls upon thorns, and that which falls on good ground. And the good ground is prepared by the heavenly father.

He prepares that ground. We don't prepare that ground ourselves. As the Lord says in the passage we've just been reading, we can do nothing without him. And so also for us, the soil in our hearts to be changed, from being changed from a stony heart to a fleshly heart is the work that has to be engaged in by the Lord himself.

[12:17] And so he says, my father is the vinedresser. He is the one who prepares the soil in the parable of the sower and the seed, and he's the one who encourages growth.

growth. You are the branches. You and I are the branches who are tied to the trellises so that we can be in the right place to achieve growth and receive sunshine and tending and bear fruit.

For the Christian, fruit is obedience. The fruit is worship.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faith.

All these are aspects of the fruit. Remember the passage in Galatians chapter 5? It's the fruit of the spirit.

[13:29] And so as Christians, we should bear this fruit. And that is portrayed here in this parable as the fruit that is gained by being obedient to the law and walking in the light as he is in the light.

Now these verses are about fruit bearing in our Christian lives. But sadly, many of us bear very little or even no fruit at all.

So just look fairly briefly now at what this parable is saying. It says, every branch in me. So what the Lord here is talking about, he's talking about Christians.

He's not talking about the world. He's talking here about Christians. People like Paul talks to in his letters. His letters to the churches are to the Christians.

John's letters are to the, those who are scattered abroad. They are to the Christians. And so also, these letters, like the letters to the churches in Revelations, they're all to Christians.

[14:38] So the Lord says, every branch in me that bears no fruit, he takes away. Now, that phrase, takes away, Gennison has an idea that it's going to be thrown away.

But that's not what the word really means. Takes away, and even in the new translation in the ESV, it still takes away. It really means lift up. The Greek word is A-I-R-O, Aero, to air something.

You lift it up. Lift up from the ground. Why? Why does it need to be lifted up? Well, a vine, as it begins to grow, is I suppose much like a strawberry plant or even a climbing rose.

It'll grow along the ground unless it is lifted up or staked, and that's what has to happen here. A vine, as it begins to grow, will grow along the ground.

And when it's there, it lies in the ground and there's no sunshine there. It's only dust. It's only dirt. And in amongst all that mud and dust and dirt, it cannot bear any fruit.

[15:54] So if it's not bearing fruit, the branch has to be lifted up. And so the vine dresser lifts it up and he washes it and ties it up so that it's soon flourishing and thriving and bearing fruit.

And what this idea of lifting up and washing is the idea that the Lord has seen someone who is out of the way, someone who's perhaps sinning against light, someone who's a Christian and yet not fulfilling the calling to which they've been called.

And so the Lord needs to engage in discipline of some sort, a rebuke from God's word, a rebuke from the Lord's people. And the Lord begins always the rebukes in a kind of whisper.

Gradually, the tone of the Lord's rebukes will increase from rebuke perhaps even to chastisement. But at the moment here, the Lord is rebuking in this kind, gentle way to encourage growth and to encourage fruitfulness.

And so when we sin from time to time and when we grieve the Spirit, the washing and the cleansing is God's way of disciplining us.

[17:15] The same as correcting a wayward branch so that it might bear more fruit. See, this parable represents, many of the aspects of the parable represent rebuke and chastisement and scourging for sin.

What stops us from bearing fruit is excusing sin in some avenue other in our lives. whether it's weakness or temperament or something in our physical or emotional makeup that stops us being the Christians we should be.

But we never have any right to complain about the way God has made us by saying that we have a weakness in our makeup or our temperament is not right and then blame God for the way that we are.

And the only way back then is by repentance. Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of a sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth with grief and hatred turn from that sin unto God with full purpose of and obedience unto a new life. obedience with God and that obedience itself brings joy into the experience of the Christian. and then the Lord says later on in this very same parable every branch in me that bears fruit he prunes. [19 : 14] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vines neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine you are the branches whoever abides in me and I in him he it is that bears much fruit but apart from me you can do nothing. every branch in me bearing fruit he prunes.

Now pruning is necessary because a vine of itself will produce only leaves. those perhaps of you who are gardeners talk about a rose earlier on a climbing rose any rose that is not pruned will only bear leaves.

You will see stalks and those of you who perhaps have rose gardens or propagate roses you will know that every spring that rose has to be pruned back to however many shoots so it can grow healthily and strongly again in the next season.

And the vine is identical to that. Pruning is necessary because otherwise all the branch would do would be to produce leaves.

[20 : 47] Leaves and more leaves but absolutely no fruit. And so to encourage fruitfulness and growth the leaves have to be cut away quite ferociously.

The vine left to itself as I said would only be a plant bearing leaves but a great show of greenery but no sign of grapes whatsoever.

So the vine dresser has to prune the leaves cut away from the plant itself every display of showings or vanity.

Same thing applies to the Christian. God has to prune away from us everything of self all self righteousness everything of pride in our lives everything of vanity in our lives.

The Lord has to cut that away from us so that we become dependent of him abiding in him knowing that without him we can do nothing. It's only as we are in him that we will find fulfillment because it is by his strength his spirit his teaching that we will grow in the grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 14] And what the vine dresser does is he prunes our lives is he makes us dissatisfied with the worldliness which we are so prone to cultivate in our own lives.

All of us are very much prone to that. We live in a world where we are surrounded by materialism where we are surrounded by ambition where the sign of God's blessing is almost we expect God to bless us and promote us and to make us richer and more prosperous.

The Bible never promises that. But that's what we somehow expect. But this pruning is to take away such ideas and to encourage us to be in the word and to walk in obedience rather than to walk in worldliness and ambition.

It prunes away from us selfish habits. Habits which satisfy the self and yet have no bearing upon our spirituality. For instance, we'd rather engage in sports than spirituality.

Godliness says, bodily exercise profits but a little. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

[23 : 51] And so we have here this whole aspect of the Lord intervening in our lives. And we should pray that the Lord would intervene if we are worldly, if we are materialistic, that the Lord would bring us back to himself, bring us to the place where we would glorify his name in living more spiritual, more God fearing and more God honoring lives.

Sometimes exercise becomes more important than meetings. We go for runs in the evening perhaps or early morning. We make all the time we want to get physically fit and yet a prayer meeting or other means of grace can be laid aside at the slightest excuse.

Now I'm not pointing the finger at anyone. I pointed just as much to myself. Perhaps not with exercise but for other reasons for not going to the meeting. Other perhaps more worldly reasons for not going.

And so all of us are prone to such accuses, such worldliness that would keep us away from the throne of grace. So what the vine dresser has to do in us is a need, build up a need in us for self-discipline.

Crucifying the flesh, holding down that which we would rather engage in to our own detriment and to the detriment of the glory of God.

[25 : 20] And knowing that it is in obedience that God would have us to walk. And as we walk in that obedience, so it will produce in us joy.

We want to know joy? It will be in walking in obedience with God, walking in fellowship with the Lord's people, in being at the means of grace, in keeping his commandments.

All these are aspects of being obedient to God, walking in the light as he is in the light, having fellowship with him and with one another. And so we will know that in a joy.

John writes in the gospel of joy, these things I write unto you that your joy might be fulfilled, might be complete. And so in that first chapter he explains how that joy might be complete, walking in the light, confessing your sins, being in the right place, spiritually, that you should be.

joy might be. And then as we look at this, we know that the testing of our faith is not joyous, but grievous.

[26 : 32] But it works in us a far more exceeding and abundant and eternal reward. Remember the lives of David. David who went so far out of the way and yet had to be brought back by chastisement.

Went so far out of the way that although he was forgiven, yet the seeds of his disobedience continued with him for the rest of his life. The sword never left his family. He knew heartache and heartbreak for the rest of his life, even on his deathbed.

If we think of Moses, that meek servant of God, moments of rashness and anger against God and the people, caused that he will never see the promised land.

If we think of Paul, Paul's own experience of how he suffered during his life. All these are testings, all these are prunings, all things that he experienced to make him more godlike in his worship and his honour of God.

And so we're asked to give up our idols, give up those things which we perhaps tend to concentrate on. Perhaps might be children or it might be our homes or it might be careers or it might be possessions, things we idolise.

[27 : 55] Cowper, in one of his hymns, he writes, the dearest idol I have known, what e'er that idol be, I beg you, tear it from your throne, so I worship only thee.

that can be quite a hard prayer to pray. Very difficult to know what our idols are and we are praying, we are earnestly entreating God to tear those idols away from us so that we are drawn closer and back to God.

But surely that's what we want, being God's people, that's what we want, to be close to them. We want to obey him, we want to see the smile on his face, want to hear the expression of the words well done, good and faithful servant.

And so we are asked to abide in me and I in you. Not only does he want us to bear fruit and more fruit, but he wants us to bear much fruit, again much like the parable of the soul and the soil.

Some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some a hundredfold. The Lord wants us to bear fruit a hundredfold. But it needs self discipline. It needs self-examination.

[29 : 20] It needs the aspect of being in the spirit and walking in the spirit and being in the place where we know God and his people will be.

remember just for a moment before we close, excuses that were made by the guests to the great supper, those who were invited.

They all with one consent began to make excuse. One man said, I have just bought a piece of ground and I must need to go to examine it.

Do you think he bought that piece of ground without having looked at it first? Or did he just buy a piece of ground that could have been full of stones and rocks and thorns or did he know that piece of ground was right?

So the excuse is totally without foundation. The other one says, I've just bought some oxen and I need to go and test them. Did he buy the oxen without going to look at them first and seeing how they looked and examining their parentage and their breeding?

[30 : 35] Would we go and buy perhaps a house or perhaps even a car or whatever without looking at it and testing it before we bought it? And the third person says, I've just married a wife.

Was it the wife who in some way was preventing the husband going because the wife wanted the companionship of the husband instead of going out to the prayer meeting?

And so all these are excuses which really have no foundation. The Lord says to his disciples on one occasion, if a man loves wives, children, lands, cattle, possessions more than me, he cannot be my disciple.

The Lord asks us to put him first in every situation. He asks to be first in our life. He asks us to make choices and the greatest choice he asks us to make is that we will walk in faith and in obedience and love.

And the more we do that, the more we will know the joy that each one of us craves. Where is the blessedness? I knew when first I saw the Lord.

[32 : 03] And where is that soul refreshing view Jesus and his word? It's in obedience. It's in giving fast by the Lord. It's in walking with him.

May the Lord then bless these thoughts to us. We should conclude our worship then singing to God's praise in Psalm 80. Verse 14, Psalm 80 on page 396.

376. No, that's not right.

verse 134. Page 334.

Psalm 80 verse 14. O God of hosts, we thee beseech, return now unto thine, look down from heaven in love, behold, and visit in this thy wine.

[33 : 15] We'll sing to the end of the psalm, six stanzas to God's praise. O God of posts, we thee these .

It's we come what has a worry, and is the hear by wine.

This thing I bid thy door bright on, but how did I come on?

And as they cast it for myself, thou hast made to be strong.

For doubt it is with flaming fire, it also is cut down.

[34 : 34] It utterly appenishes, whereas thy face the crown.

O let thy hand be still upon the hand of thy right hand.

The sound of man who bore thyself, thou made us strong to stand.

So henceforth we will not go back, nor turn from thee at all.

For you thou faken hast had thee, a pop of thy name will call.

[35 : 50] Turn us again, Lord God of all. Stand up upon us, thou art safe.

To make thy countenance to shine. And so we shall be saved.

And now may grace, mercy and peace. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, rest on you and abide in you now and always.

Amen. Amen.