

**Reading:** John 15v1-17

**Theme:** Jesus the Vine (2).

This morning we return to consider the Lord Jesus' teaching using the picture of Him being the Vine and believers the branches. Last time you may recall I looked at only one heading of two I prepared, or over prepared - as I realised it would be too long a sermon to do both! The point we looked at last time was: **1. The Picture of the Vine.** Jesus uses this picture of Himself, a great and glorious picture of Him as the real, the true Vine, the One who would produce the true fruit and fulfil all the types, pictures to which the OT temple, sacrifices, rituals, ordinances pointed and to have the people of God bring forth true fruit to God through their living union in and with Him. Only living branches in union with Him can grow and produce fruit. Any new growth, shoot or branches cut off soon withered and no fruit is produced on them. It is a graphic picture, especially in the ME heat.

I emphasised and will do so again, that we as individuals need to be in a living union in and with Christ. It is not enough to be moral, to be religious in a small or great way, but we need to have a true saving faith in Jesus as our only Saviour and not feel we have to bring anything to the table to contribute to such, to make Him inclined towards us or make ourselves more acceptable to Him. This picture of Jesus as the Vine is not an all-inclusive picture of everything about what it is to be a Christian, live the Christian life, nor covers every aspect of His care of us as believers, but it supplements, adds to and further enlarges

our understanding further of what it is to be a Christian. Here it drives home the absolute necessity to be in a living union with Christ – His life as the Vine being ours by our union with Him through saving faith.

As I said last time, we will move on to consider this morning:

## **2. The picture of the Father as the Vinedresser.** (v1b & 2)

Jesus says His Father is the gardener, the husbandman, the farmer. The Greek allows for such, also the term “*vinedresser*”. He is the one with specialist skill to attend the Vine to produce maximum fruit. As believers we are the branches, are in a living union with Jesus and we need both tending and care to constantly bear, produce increasingly more fruit in our lives for our God. The care lavished on us will be the fatherly care, the care of God the Father.

In Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5 the vineyard is pictured as being planted and cared for by the Lord. He plants, cares, tends and nurtures. Here Jesus draws our attention to the divine husbandman, gardener, vinedresser. Never has there been One so wise, so skilful, so watchful about His Vineyard as God is about the Church. The Church consists of all those in this living union with Christ - no matter their age or sex, or nationality, their church building or worship style. If they are born-again of God’s Spirit, they are in a living union with Christ and part of **the Church**.

Here the Father is said to be responsible for 2 actions, which continues the picture of the Vine, branches and the vinedresser - both involve the right and wise use of the knife on two different types of branches! Those that bear no fruit are cut-off! Those that bear fruit are cut back!

**Cut-off branches:** Some may panic at this picture as v2 seems to say that unfruitful Christians are cut-off discarded and eventually thrown into the fire! Is Jesus really saying we, as Christians, truly born-again of God can then be cut-off and perish as if we never knew Christ? Some say this is what it says here - if we do not bear fruit, we will be cut-off and perish, making this is a solemn warning, a solemn prospect that Christians can lose their salvation. It becomes a tragic thing to preach, a reason for despair, nightmares and removes our hope and confidence - as they say we can lose our salvation, fail to get to heaven and end up in hell! Is it really what this verse clearly says?

We need to take Scripture and compare it with Scripture and not take a verse, especially a controversial, difficult verse, in isolation as if it says everything about the matter. If we take a text out of context all that we are left with is a con! The Bible teaches us that when we are saved, converted, born again, regenerated, given new life, we are grafted into Christ and if in Him, we are in Him forever. What we should never say or think is *“Well I’m saved now, so no worries. I can live as I like as I am going to*

*heaven and nothing can change that. So, I can live as I please!*” Have you heard that said? I have!

Paul wrote “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! [God forbid, KJV] (Romans 6: 1-2)*”. As Paul preached the gospel, he expected an objection - an objection for which every Christian must be prepared. We are not to think “*We can go on sinning, so that grace may increase?*” Some say this because God’s salvation really is free and it causes some to question that if Jesus “*picks up the tab*” for all our bad things, doesn’t that just encourage us to be free and easy with sin?

The problem with this thinking, is that it is individualistic and impersonal. It springs from thinking of salvation as a thing, as though God hands us a blank check for our sins, underwritten by Christ’s blood. Then we can be tempted to run off and spend God’s grace on our sinful pleasures. This it is not the case, God gives us a Person called Christ— the Person to whom we have been united (**Romans 6:2-14**) - baptized into Him, crucified with Him, buried with Him and raised again to newness of life (v3-7). We are not individuals with a “*get-out-of-hell-free card*.” We are members of Christ Himself who has carried us out of the Egypt of sin and into the Promised Land of His righteousness. We have not been saved **to** sin; we have been saved **from** sin and freed **to** live a new life and not to take Christ into sin with us in our lives!

Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, wrote about Christians visiting a brothel. I wonder how we would tell people to stop visiting prostitutes! I think we'd be tempted to say, "*You might have Jesus now, but if you visit the brothel, He will leave you at the door. When you sin, you're on your own.*" That's how we think. But it is not what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:15 "*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! [God forbid]*" Paul says we are so united to Jesus that no sin of ours breaks that union. Even if we visit the brothel (*other sins are available*) we do not break off from our union with Jesus, but we take Jesus into that sin! We may think "*How horrible, disgusting!*" Exactly – so stop it! Stop dragging Jesus into sin in our lives!

Paul never says, "*You are conditionally united to Jesus and if you're good He'll love you.*" No. We are unbreakably united to Jesus, even as we commit the grossest or 'most respectable' of sins. Such is to make us cry out "*God forbid*" when we contemplate spiritual adultery with any sin. We may think God would keep us more honest if His love were conditional, but conditional love can easily turn our hearts away from our Lover and towards other things. Unconditional love captures the heart. Christ grips us with a love that says, "*No matter where you go or what you do, I am with you, I am in you, I am for you.*" Shall we sin against such almighty, unbreakable love? God forbid!

Being united with Christ in this personal way, we realise He is holy, obedient, pure, He has kept God's law in all things, He pleased His Father and not Himself. We learn our old ways were corrupt and wrong and now we are born of God's Spirit and are to produce the fruit of the Spirit which is always contrary to the fruit of the flesh; we are to put off the old man and put on the new man in Christ. True Christians will produce good fruit in their lives.

Those not producing **true fruit**, even if they look the part, show they have no real union with Him. They may be moral, religious, baptised, on a church membership roll, have a position in the church, may be able to argue for Christianity and the Bible. Yet these are really false branches, having nothing of Christ's life flowing through them, they have never had a work of grace in their lives, never been born-again of God's Spirit, never been grafted into the Vine. Outwardly they look the part, but no life from the Vine is in them.

Sometimes buds are grafted into a host plant and seem fine for a while, but eventually show they have not taken, die and are cut-off. They were on a bush or tree, but had no living union with it. These ones are taken away by the Father. Sometimes this occurs in this life - by adversity or prosperity - both can be used to cut-off the nominal Christian, but will occur in eternity, as fruitless branches will be cast away. We will see more of this **next time**.

The **branches producing fruit** also come under the knife - are purged, cleansed - pruned is the meaning of the word. No fruit bearing branches are exempt from this. I have read on pruning vines and it looks a radical process! If the vine is not pruned correctly and hard, it becomes “*dense*” - producing wood, branches and not fruit. A vine needs to produce fruit as its branches and wood are pretty useless except for producing fruit! As believers we need to be pruned to produce fruit - not to be wooden and certainly not dense! Our lives as Christians are pruned - cleansed, purged in order for us to produce more fruit - adversity or prosperity can prune us - again we’ll see **next time**.

If we are Christians, we are to be aware of this in our Father’s providential dealings with us - in all the changing scenes of life - He’s always looking for fruit to His glory. It is not always easy for us, as pruning may often hurt. The knife sometimes cuts deep and maybe at our most tender or precious points, but it is for our fruit bearing to God and therefore necessary.

Possibly there may be someone watching or listening and you know that you are not joined to the Lord Jesus or have His life in you. Yes, you may do the right things (*on Sunday at least*), but you know you’re not right with God. You may fear that you will be cut-off and you do not want to be cast away. I urge you, plead with you to seek the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. Call on Him to cut-off, remove your sin today in you by granting you grace to believe, to trust the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and He

would take you and put you into the true Vine. For us all, consider these verses well, for they are both encouraging, yet challenging verses. I pray we would all be true fruit bearing branches in the Lord Jesus.

In these confusing times it is probable that as individuals or as a church we will be facing something in our lives that will test us - whether prosperity or adversity. Certainly, we are being tested in this Covid time and all the concerns, fears, difficulties and pressures it brings upon or lives in various ways. We who know and love the Lord may question, be afraid as matters loom on the horizon in front of us, yet it is for our benefit - our pruning so that we may produce more fruit to our God's glory. Let us consciously commit our fears into His wise hands, He will never cause any child of His a needless tear. He can be trusted in the pruning, the cutting back times - even when they seem hard and painful. He knows all that lies ahead for us and He still works all things together for good to those who love Him, to those called according to His purpose - so that we become conformed more and more to the image of His Son - His purpose is to make us more and more like Jesus. Surely that is what we want and makes all we go through worth it - to be more like our Saviour in our lives.