

JOHN 15 : 1 - 6

GOD IS LIKE A GARDENER

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 bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the Word which 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 vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

What's the point of having a garden? Is it to decorate the yard? Only if it's a flower garden. However, I mean a garden-garden, a vegetable garden. What is the point of having a vegetable garden? Is it to make work? Only if it's a "hobby" garden; and then, just enough work to be enjoyable. But I mean toilsome work—weeding, watering, hoeing. You know the answer. It's the same answer as, Why does a farmer plant fields of wheat, beans, corn? For the harvest! the crop! the produce!

Jesus here talks in a parable in terms of a "vineyard"—a special garden where grapevines grow. The vineyard He describes is under God's care. God is the vinedresser, gardener, or "husbandman" (It's old English, and we do still use the word "husbandman" in phrases like "animal husbandry"—the management of raising animals.) In this vineyard of God, there is one grapevine, one plant, one trunk on which He centers all His attention. Jesus is the grapevine. On that grapevine, you and I are the branches. What is the purpose of this whole operation? The purpose is the production of grapes, not just for one season, but year after year after year.

Jesus says, the Father looks for us, the branches, to bear fruit on His Vine. What does such fruit look like? **1)** Living as God intends, keeping His will and His commands, serving and obeying Him in love, honor, and respect. For what He says is right and best, not what people say. **2)** Bearing fruit for Him involves more than trying to be perfect. Because you are a sinner and are unable to do what God expects, God sent His Son Jesus to be your crucified and risen Savior. To bear fruit for God is to cling by faith to the Savior, and in Christ to serve the Lord willingly as His dearly loved children. **3)** To bear fruit for God is also to share the Good News of Christ the Savior with those near you and far from you. "Make disciples of all nations," Jesus said (Matthew 28:19). **4)** Finally, to bear fruit for God is to love others as God has loved you—which does not mean to let them do whatever they want—what kind of love would that be from a parent? Rather, as opportunity arises to show them their sin and the dire consequences from God—which people sometimes already see—and to show them their Savior who is merciful, loving, forgiving, and rescuing.

The parable warns that if there are branches on God's grapevine in Christ that bear or "carry" no fruit, God is displeased. He "lifts" them in judgment to take them away. "Look at this one. Worthless! I shall get rid of it." God does indeed cast away those who are fruitless, who live without Christ.

Regarding branches that do carry fruit, God doesn't just pass them by and say, "Keep it up!" He prunes them. I know enough about grapes to know that grapevines produce better when pruned. Some pruning sources say, "When you think you have pruned far too much, then it's probably about right." The vine—the trunk itself—is not pruned, but the branches. When pruned by an expert, the branches are not just pruned haphazardly. The vinedresser knows what needs to be done for the best harvest. His intent is not to damage or hurt the branches, but to make them better.

If it feels like you are getting pruned in life, remember God's goal is not to harm you, but to bring you closer to Him, to His way, and to His Son—for your fruitfulness as branches in His vineyard. The text does not literally say God "prunes"—cuts around—but God "cleans" the branches! Think of the vinedresser, the husbandman, meticulously examining each branch and "cleaning" away what is detrimental to good harvest. That's how God works with you! Whether a child or an adult, do you ever get yourself perfectly clean? Or your room? Every day more dirt comes. The job is never done. Likewise, before God the sinner always needs cleaning and pruning. Thank Him for the pruning. Don't grumble. *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives (Hebrews 12:6).*

Jesus says, *You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you.* Living in the Word of salvation in Jesus keeps one alive and fruitful. *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.* To disconnect yourself from Jesus and His Word is spiritual suicide. A branch disconnected from the vine—no matter how great of a branch—is finished and done for! Without being attached to the vine, there is no life. That is the danger of staying away from God's House, from worship, and from the preaching of the Word. The connection with the Savior grows thin and weak.. There is no other vine to which to be attached—none that will give life. It's like wiring a branch from another tree into your fresh-cut Christmas tree to fill in a bare spot. That branch is the first to wither and dry, no matter how good it looks!

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. Destruction awaits the branches that are fruitless. When that happens, to whom goes the shame? In the vineyard, does the gardener get the shame, or does the vine get the shame, for fruitless branches? No. the branches do. They are no good. They are cast away. They are thrown out into the garbage, or buried in the ground, or—the ultimate in destruction—they are burned. Rapid oxidation destroys them quickly and thoroughly.

In God's vineyard, does God get the shame for such unfruitful branches? Does Jesus? No. The branches themselves get the blame and get the shame. Such a branch is no good. He gets cast out and burned. However, Scripture says, the fires of hell never go out! Those condemned never pass out of existence. *If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where "Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched"* (Mark 9:43-44, quoting Isaiah 66:24).

On the other hand, when branches on a physical grapevine produce abundantly, does anyone praise the individual branches? No one says, "What a great branch!" But "What a tremendous grapevine!" Or "This grower has such a green thumb!" In your Christian life too, do not labor for your glory in what you have done. The glory goes to Christ who gives you life and to the Father who sent Him. Bear much fruit is to the glory of your Triune God. God the Father (the gardener) provides the vine, and meticulously sees to it that each branch is all that it can be on the vine. God the Son (the vine) provides life to each branch, an impossibility for them on their own. And God the Holy Spirit transports the lifegiving sap to each branch. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).*

What a blessing to be in God's vineyard! Let us bear fruit gladly and willingly for God, for we are branches on Christ the Vine. That's what God wants. That's what living branches in Christ do. God is a master-gardener. He deals in the best way with you in Jesus!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---