

## SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

## JOHN 15:1-6

## THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

*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 [cleans], 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.*

If you farm, have you been on the land already? If you're a gardener, have been working in the garden? If you are a rancher, do you already have the plan for putting the bulls with the cows? What is the point of all this activity for farmer, gardener, rancher? Is it to make the fields look nice? To see to it that the garden doesn't just go to weeds? So that the bulls feel like part of the herd? The point is HARVEST-- the produce, the profit, the fruit, the benefit!

The same is true in the Kingdom of God. The Lord looks for fruit, spiritual "fruit," in His Kingdom. Jesus often used examples from everyday life to picture His relation to our lives. *I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35). I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). I am the Door (John 10:7).* In our text He says, *I am the Vine. You are the branches (John 15:5).* The picture is easy to understand—it's a grape vine with branches growing out of it. The branches get their life from the vine. Without the vine, they are done. Jesus says *I am the true vine*. The reality is, there are other vines out there, some seem more pleasing in appearance and more impressive in size, more productive of good fruit. The key is "**seem**." They seem to be better, but are not. Perhaps some of these false vines grow right alongside Jesus the true Vine. The false plant competes using lies, deception, and un-truths. Such false vines are the work of the devil. The devil is not the true vine. He conceals his outward appearance. In Eden he used a serpent. He conceals his intent—to hurt, to harm, to destroy. He makes it sound like He has a better offer. He cannot be trusted for earth or for heaven. He mimics the truth. Martin Luther said, "Where God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel."

Jesus is the precious, true vine. And Jesus says the Father is *the vinedresser*, the one who works the ground and the plants. The Old King James Translation says the Father is the "husbandman." In old English a husbandman was one who worked and managed a farm or a household. In ag. life today we still hear the terms "animal husbandry" and "crop husbandry." The Father is the husbandman, the vinedresser, who has prepared all things and sent the Son, the Vine of Life. He makes a place for us in His Kingdom. The Father has left nothing to chance. He daily kept and keeps all things running even in this temporal universe—heat of the sun, photosynthesis of the plants, each and every breath you take, and each and every heartbeat. The Father did not wind up this world like a big clock and then let it run itself. He continues to work, particularly as the vinedresser for the vine and for the branches on the vine—all the Kingdom of Christ. You're not just passing through this world by chance or on your own. *In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He works all things together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28).* His interest is the vine of salvation in Christ and the branches on it. He cares for you.

This brings us to the ultimate goal. He looks for fruit, produce, harvest from the branches on His Vine. What exactly is the fruit that He looks for? Don't answer too hastily by saying, He wants us to bear fruit by telling others about Jesus. That is true; but the first fruit He is looking for is your own faith of the heart. Do you cling to Jesus' blood bought forgiveness? *This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life (John 6:40).* To be attached to the vine of Christ, means that His life flows into you. You yourself become fruit for His eternal kingdom. You are justified and are clean! Jesus says, *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.* What does justified mean? In earthly terms "to be proved right." "My dad was justified in his suspicions about my new friend." But in Biblical terms "You are justified through Christ," doesn't mean you are proved right on the basis of what you have accomplished. To be justified through Jesus, means that the Judge pronounces you not guilty of any crime, for Jesus' sake. Clinging by faith to Jesus for forgiveness is the number one fruit for which the Vinedresser looks.

There is yet another aspect to the fruit the Father seeks from branches on Christ the Vine. The fruit of a Christian life. Faith in Christ is worked by the Holy Spirit using the Word. Through His work we look to Christ for righteousness, and through His work the sinner's heart is changed. Our sinful nature with which we are born, also called the Old Adam, or the sinful flesh, wants only to serve self. However, through faith in Christ that sinful nature is rebuffed by our new nature with its fruits of the Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22).* The Holy Spirit creates a new heart and a new man in the Branch, who does not serve self, but the Lord and one another.

*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.* The Father, the Vinedresser has no use for branches without fruit. Such branches make a mockery of Jesus the Vine and His salvation. *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--*a reference to the fires of hell. The future for the unfruitful branch is doom. In some instances, a person might look like a branch of Christ's Kingdom, act like a branch of God's Kingdom in Christ, but if there is no Christian fruit, there is, no faith in Christ. God cannot be fooled. Such a one does not abide in Christ, is separated from Christ as a worthless branch, a fruitless branch, and cast into the fires of hell. Beware.

There is another truth in this text that we need to ponder. *Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes [cleans], that it may bear more fruit.* The Vinedresser's goal is not that each branch produces a little fruit, or some fruit, but more fruit, much fruit. The Father wants you to be all He has made you to be, a living fruit-bearing branch on Christ the vine. To that end, He will sometimes "clean" you or "prune" you in life. Not because He likes cutting you short, not because He likes redirecting you (sometimes against your will), but His goal is that you bear fruit in your life in Christ. And that's the best! *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.* The Vinedresser's goal is to keep you dependent on Christ. That may hurt your feelings or crunch your pride, but being independent of Christ means you are worthless to the Vinedresser. You are bearing no fruit. . . Living an admirable life apart from the Savior accomplishes nothing. Being a good person, apart from Christ, is not really being a good person. at all. It is despising the Vine, in whom is your life. *Hebrews 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please God.*

I have visited already with individuals who have distanced themselves from worship, from the Word, from the preaching of Christ, from the personal assurance of forgiveness in the Lord's Supper, who say, "I know I am still a Christian, because I pray." Prayer does not make one a child of God. Christ does. Christ is declared to us in the Word. My concern is that prayer can easily be offered to "God," (god) but totally apart from faith in Christ. Without Christ as Savior, prayers such as, "Help get through the day. Help me to get a different job. Teach me to love my husband or wife, and the children. Keep me safe from bad weather. Etc." are not expressions of attachment to the Vine. They are words from a branch that is merely outwardly connected to the "God," but not to Christ. Such a heart is not really bearing fruit, and thus really not connected to God. I can't look into hearts; but God knows. And there are other distanced-from-church individuals with whom I have spoken who have said, "When I get my life under control, when I get on top of things again, when I get things straightened around—after this move, after this change in work, after this surgery, etc., then I'll get back to church." It's backwards! Is this bearing fruit? No. When God prunes you in life, it is so that you're drawn closer to Him, not so that you think you will get yourself back to Him.

Are there some things in life which the Vinedresser has pruned away from you, about which you still have yearnings and regrets? Climbing a mountain, moving to Alaska, playing more sports, getting a high paying job, not getting to know that guy or that gal in high school to whom you were visually attracted, going to college, building a new home, traveling coast to coast? If there are things God has pruned out of your life, let go. He's done it for your own good. The things that you check off from your personal bucket-list do not make your role in life worthy, nor do they lead you to bear more fruit in Christ. Your value is in Jesus.

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So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach