

John 15:1-8 Branches Bear Fruit

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
www.calvarydcmetro.org

This morning we come to one of the most well known and loved passages in all of John's Gospel, so we're going to just skip any introduction and jump right into it. Read the section with me and then we'll come back to the top and make some observations.

Remember, this is Jesus talking to His disciples on the night before He is crucified – this is part of His final words to them and if you've been keeping track – it's His seventh and final I AM statement.

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 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.

5 "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. 6 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. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

The passage is full of rich imagery and it's easy to get lost in all the points that are made here, but the bottom line is: we, as Christians, are designed to bear fruit by abiding in Christ and being tended by God.

So, if you have ever wondered if there is a plan or purpose for your life, if you've ever wondered if there was something you were really supposed to do, something you were made for, the answer is yes. You were designed to bear fruit, to be a conduit – God flowing in and godliness flowing out.

Long ago, God tried to establish this relationship with the nation of Israel, He wanted to work through them to bless the nations, but they drifted in their hearts and wandered off after their own ambitions. Turn with me to Isaiah 5 and you'll see what I mean:

1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved
A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:

My Well-beloved has a vineyard
On a very fruitful hill.

2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
He built a tower in its midst,
And also made a winepress in it;
So He expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes,
But it brought forth wild grapes.

3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.

4 What more could have been done to My vineyard
That I have not done in it?

Why then, when I expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes,
Did it bring forth wild grapes?

5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard:
I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;
And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6 I will lay it waste;
It shall not be pruned or dug,
But there shall come up briars and thorns.
I will also command the clouds
That they rain no rain on it.”

7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel,
And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.
He looked for justice, but behold, oppression;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry *for help*.

God invested everything in and got nothing out. He looked for fruit, and there was nothing useable there. And yet, instead of just torching the planet and going about His business, instead of just walking away and letting us all destroy ourselves, what does He do? He let judgment come on Israel, remember, after Isaiah’s prophecies they went into captivity in Babylon. But then, 500 years later, God sent His own son to do for us what we could never do on our own.

So now we find Jesus telling the disciples, I am the true vine, and you are the branches, and if we remain connected to the vine, we *will* produce fruit, good fruit.

Actually, flip back over to John with me, and notice there is a progression. Verse two says God prunes the branches that bear fruit so they can bear *more* fruit. And then in verse five Jesus says that if you remain in Him, if you abide in Him, as time goes on, you will bear ‘much fruit.’ So that’s normal Christian development – fruit, then more fruit, then much fruit. That’s the plan. That’s the expectation. That’s “normal Christian living.”

“Ok,” some of you are wondering, “But what is fruit?” What are you talking about?

Some of the rest of you are saying, “Oh, I know! I know!”

Well, you're right, so let's go over and take a look at Galatians 5 where Paul lays out for us what fruit looks like in the life of the believer.

In order to explain what fruit is, he makes a comparison, showing us what a life looks like when it is not connected to Jesus the vine:

Galatians 5: 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

So, in order for fruit to be born, something has to die. We don't produce this fruit automatically, it's not natural - we produce it because we are in relationship with Christ - because He is having His way in us.

So now we understand the kind of fruit that ought to be appearing in our lives. As you invite Jesus in, and begin to submit to Him as the Lord of your life, you begin to look more like Him and less like you. Over time there ought to be a noticeable trend in the direction of your life toward godliness.

People will ask the question at times, "is so-and-so saved?" Maybe you want to know about your child, are they really saved? Or the person your child is dating. Or the person you're dating, or thinking about dating. Or your aunt who has a Bible and few religious books, but you're just not sure where she's at. We all have people that we want to know, are they saved?

I don't think you can know with 100% certainty about someone else's salvation - but you can get really close by watching their life - what kind of fruit do you see? If they are a true Christian, you will see fruit - maybe not all at once, but over time. And if they are maturing in their faith, you'll see more fruit, and eventually, much fruit. And if that happens, you can be pretty sure that person is saved. You can even make the same judgment on yourself.

But what if there is no fruit? Jesus says if there isn't any, the Father will cut away that branch and put it in the fire.

Well, what does that mean?

Most likely, we should understand the branches that aren't producing like people who hang out around church for a while, maybe even do some things in ministry but then drop out of the picture - they weren't ever really Christians in the first place. Think of people like

Judas who spent so much time around Jesus, heard all the stuff He had to say, even went on mission trips, but was never really 'in.' That's the kind of person we're talking about here.

If you're saying "Lord, have your way in me! Flow into me and out of me!" don't worry about being clipped off and cast away. You'll get clipped, but it's for another reason we'll talk about later.

For now, let's remember that abiding in Christ produces fruit. And there are several points we can make about that from these verses.

1. Jesus expects that EVERY branch to bear fruit.

2 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. There are only two categories – producers and non-producers. So, it's not just the pastors, not just the adults, not just the girls, not just 'those people,' it's all of us – every branch, will produce fruit.

But here's the thing – no branch can control it's own production or harvest. You can't just make up your mind that you're going to have a bumper crop of fruit. So don't compare the fruit on your branch with the fruit of another branch. Just ask the question, "Am I abiding in the vine?" If so, let the quantity and size of the harvest take care of itself. But remember that it is normal for you to produce fruit of some amount, and then more fruit, and then much fruit. But,

2. Branches don't produce fruit on their own.

4 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.

One of the things you ought to do during your stay here in DC is go apple picking. You can go out 66 towards West Virginia or you can go up to Maryland, there are some great places to go and it's almost prime apple season – it's a perfect thing to do in the fall.

We went with the Boudreauxs a few years back, we took the kids and had a blast – they give you these long poles with baskets on them so you can reach up and pluck the apples off the trees, and they give you a map to show you how to find all the different varieties of apples in the orchard. It's great fun, and then you get to make pie...oh man!

But you know what they don't give you? A saw. Because you can't cut a branch off and bring it home and expect it to keep producing apples for you. The branch isn't going to produce any apples unless it is attached to the tree.

And God doesn't expect you to produce any fruit on your own either. That's why Jesus says, "without Me, you can do nothing." Of course you can do some things. You can even do things that seem good, that seem important, that seem generous. But if you do them apart from Christ, you don't get any credit – they're worthless unless they're done with Him.

But don't take that as some big downer or insult. Look at it from the other side! That means that He doesn't expect anything from you that He doesn't give to you! As the great missionary Hudson Taylor used to say, "God's will, done God's way, will never lack God's supply." If God wants you to build something, He's going to give you the tools, the plans, and the materials. He wants you to bear fruit – more fruit, and much fruit – but He's going to supply all the nutrients necessary to make it happen naturally.

3. Branches produce fruit naturally.

5 "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit;

The fruit God is seeking comes from relationship, not just effort. Machines, robots, and systems produce things, or results, but living branches, connected to living vines, produce living fruit – it's a natural process, and it's not an epic struggle.

My garden is right outside my office window and I've never once heard my tomatoes complain about how busy they are. I've never heard my cucumbers grunt and groan to push out a new cucumber. As the branches abide in the vines, they just produce as the season goes on.

4. Producing fruit takes time. The whole idea of abiding reflects a relationship that spans over time. In fact, some translations use the word "remain" instead of "abide." So, "He who remains in Me..." And that's a good word to use. The point is that there should be a sense of permanence to our relationship with God that we don't find in most other things in our lives.

The most valuable thing in most people's lives is their home, and yet, according to the US Census, the average American moves 11.7 times in their life.¹ The second most valuable thing in most of our lives, materially speaking, is a car, but the average American only keeps a car for 71 months, or just shy of six years.² We go through a desktop computer every three to five years and a laptop every two to three. There's not much that sticks with us for very long in this disposable society that is always updating and upgrading.

So, in some ways, it's nice to know that once you're accepted into Christ, you're in for good. Nothing is going to change – you're called to abide. To remain. To settle in for the long haul in good times and bad. Whether He leads you to lay down in green pastures by still waters or through the very valley of the shadow of death – He is always there. He's never going to leave you or forsake you – instead, He's inviting you, gently, but firmly commanding you, to abide in Him because some fruit takes a long time to grow.

I watch that play out in my garden. The squash are ready almost instantly it seems. The tomatoes will take 50-60 days. If you look at the little tag on them when you buy them, it

¹ <http://www.census.gov/hhes/migration/about/cal-mig-exp.html> Last Accessed September 20, 2013.

² https://www.polk.com/company/news/polk_in_the_news_americans_are_keeping_new_vehicles_an_average_six_years Last Accessed September 20, 2013.

should say right on it. Compare that to the peppers – they take forever - 100 to 120 days. You plant them in late Spring and they take most of the summer to grow.

That’s nothing compared to avocados – if you take plant an avocado tree, you can expect, on average, for it take seven years to be productive.

In other words, even if you take the perfect seed, put it in the perfect soil, give it the perfect sun, water, and nutrients, it’s still going to take you a LONG time to get some fruit. Everything is happening the right way, nothing is wrong, it just takes time. And that’s why we have to abide. God doesn’t instantly transform us. He slowly, deliberately, shapes us and molds us over time as we release more of ourselves to Him.

My mom used to have this plaque hanging up in our house that said, “Please be patient, God isn’t finished with me yet.” It’s true. God isn’t finished with you. He’s actively working on you, He wants to be working in you, and there’s no stop in sight. He wants this to go on and on as you abide in Him.

5. Pruning increases productivity.

2 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.

In order for you to bear more fruit and much fruit, God has to do some trimming, some remodeling, in your life from time to time. Jesus compares it to pruning a vine.

Listen to Wikipedia’s definition of pruning:

“Pruning in landscaping and gardening is the practice of removing diseased, non-productive, or otherwise unwanted portions from a plant. The purpose of pruning is to shape the plant by controlling or directing plant growth, to maintain the health of the plant, or to increase the yield or quality of flowers and fruits.”

In other words - Pruning makes healthier and more productive plants. You take something out, often living plant tissue, so that more can grow. It’s not just a one for one exchange – it’s not like the lawn, you cut it and it just grows back; no pruning removes one thing so that something MORE or better can come.

Virginia Tech’s Cooperative Extensive Office publishes, “A Guide to Successful Pruning”³ which answers the question, why prune? Listen to the answers.

1. To train young plants. Train main scaffold branches (those that form the structure of the canopy) to produce stronger and more vigorous trees. ***You’ll find it easier to shape***

³ <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-455/430-455.html> Last Accessed 21 September, 2013.

branches with hand pruners when a plant is young than to prune larger branches later. Pruning often begins with young plants for bonsai, topiary, espalier, or other types of special plant training.

2. To influence fruiting and flowering. Proper pruning of flower buds encourages early vegetative growth. You can also use selective pruning to stimulate flowering in some species, and to help produce larger (though fewer) fruits in others.

Example – pinching tomato flowers,

3. To rejuvenate old trees and shrubs. *As trees and shrubs mature, their forms may become unattractive.* Pruning can restore vigor, and enhance the appearance of these plants.

Example – basil

So, Pruning is GOOD. It helps us in our Christian walk and it's not something we should try to avoid. **Pruning is not punishment** though God does discipline those He loves. Pruning is intended to HELP, not HURT the plant. You prune plants to make them healthier, more attractive, or more productive. Isn't that the kind of life you want?

Note also, **Who does the pruning?** Who decides what needs to go and what needs to stay? Who stands back, assesses the overall growth and determines where to trim? **God the Father!** He doesn't delegate the task. He doesn't bring in some hired hand. He does the cutting Himself.

Have you experienced any pruning in your life? Is it time for a little pruning now? If so, you need to remember that the things that He is going to take out of your life don't have to be bad things – but it may be that He wants to clean things up a bit in order to prepare you for the next season of growth or productivity.

That's typically when pruning occurs – right before growth. Different plants bloom and grow during different seasons, so they need to be pruned at different times, but in general, the rule is, you prune before the next season of growing starts so that all the new growth is channeled in the right directions.

God prunes you so that you can go from bearing fruit to bearing more fruit, and then to bearing much fruit, for the glory of God. Trust Him as He works. Submit to His hand, and let Him channel the growth in your life. Abide in Jesus and let Him flow through you and you will naturally, supernaturally, produce fruit.

Let's stop there for this morning, and next week we'll look at this idea of abiding in Christ again. This week we have focused mainly on what it means to abide, next week we'll look more at the fruit, the love, that results from our abiding.

But before we go, let me just say that you weren't born a part of this vine. You have to be grafted in. You're not automatically connected to Jesus just because you think all of this sounds like a great story. Left on your own, you produce wild grapes like Israel did, and you're not useful or pleasing to God. But Jesus came so that we could be connected to Him by asking for forgiveness for living life our way and submitting to Him instead – letting Him have His way in us – flowing through, directing us. You can do that all by yourself, or you can talk with someone about it, and we would be happy to answer any questions you have.

And if you have any questions about bearing fruit or being pruned, the pastors and our wives and others are here for you. We have time for you. We're not too busy for you. We love you and it's our privilege to talk with you and pray with you.