

JOHN

Stories Related To The Last Days Of Christ

February 24, 2019

I. Introduction

A. **John 15:1-5** . . . “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 it so that it may bear more fruit. [3] You are already clean (*pruned*) because of the word which I have spoken to you. [4] Abide in Me, and I (*will abide*) in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you (*bear fruit*) unless you abide in Me. [5] I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

B. Prayer

II. The Vine, the Vinedresser, and the branches

A. Last Sunday, we looked at vs 1-2, but before moving on, I want to make a quick review and add a couple of comments to vs 2.

1. As a review, I want to remind you that Jesus is the vine, God is the vinedresser, and we are the branches.
2. The comments I want to make are related to vs 2, where Jesus said, “Every branch that bears fruit, God prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.” And the comments I want to make have to do with the question, “Why does God prune the branches that are bearing fruit?”
3. There are three answers to this question and they go like this, God prunes the branches for His sake, our sake, and the sake of those we affect by our choices and behavior.
 - a. For example, just as pruning branches so they bear an abundance of good fruit brings praise to the gardener, so pruning believers so they bear an abundance of good fruit brings glory, honor, and praise to God. Jesus said as much in vs 8, where He said, “My Father (*who is the vinedresser*) is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”
 - b. Pruning believers is also for our good in that it is part of cleansing us from our old nature and putting us in the condition whereby we can bear the fruit of our new nature – which includes being transformed by the renewing of our mind, and gaining a holiness like unto God’s holiness, and being conformed to the image or likeness of Jesus Christ.

- (1) And though being changed like this advances God's kingdom in us, in our homes, in the church, and in the world around us, it also brings us into the abundant life that Jesus came to bring us.
- (2) You see, it is the changes produced by God's pruning that frees us from such self-damaging things as pride, selfishness, self-rule, unnecessary fears, ungodly passions, unhealthy desires, foolishness, carelessness, and relationship damaging choices and behavior.
- (3) And in the same way, it is the changes produced by God's pruning that bring us into a life of selflessness, love, gratitude, contentment, inner peace, ongoing joy, and intimate fellowship with God – regardless of the circumstances.
- (4) So yes, God's pruning is for our sake just as it is for His sake.
- c. Finally, God's pruning work in the lives of believers is for the benefit of those we affect by our choices and behavior – be it our family, the community, the workplace, the church, or the nation.
 - (1) The negative consequences of sin and the blessings of righteousness have a way of spreading beyond ourselves to others, like oil on water.
 - (2) In pruning believers, God is increasing and expanding – out into the world – the blessings that come from righteousness. And I am confident we can see how great the need is for this in a world where evil and selfishness are on the increase.
4. And so I encourage you to value God's pruning work in your life and in the lives of the believers around you.
 - a. And as I pointed out last week, pruning can be painful.
 - b. Therefore, I urge you to stand together and support each other so that together we endure God's pruning and grow to bear an abundance of good fruit – for God's sake, your sake and my sake, and for the sake of those around us.
- B. Moving on, in **John 15:3**, Jesus said, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."
 1. I believe it is important to remember here that Jesus only spoke what the Father told Him to say – which means the cleansing word Jesus spoke to His disciples was – and continues to be – God's word. And this is important for us to see because God's word still has cleansing and pruning power. Jesus confirms this in **John 17:17**, where in praying to His Father He says, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

2. The word “Sanctify” means **to make holy**. It can also mean **to consecrate**.
 - a. In **John 17:17**, Jesus is asking His Father to sanctify His followers in truth, that is, the truth of God’s word.
 - b. And based on this request from Jesus, it is reasonable to conclude that He is asking God to use the power and influence of His word to cleanse and purify His followers from all that makes them unholy **in order that** they would become holy.
3. Now sometimes we talk about God’s sanctifying work as if it is quick and complete, when in fact it is a progressive process.
 - a. I liken God’s sanctifying work in us to God’s clearing the Promised Land for Israel – it was a process that was intended to take time for the sake of the people because they couldn’t handle being given a clean land all at once.
 - b. We read about this in two OT scriptures.
 - (1) **Deuteronomy 7:22**, “The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, for the wild beasts would grow too numerous for you.”
 - (2) **Exodus 23:29-30**, “I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. [30] I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.”
 - c. My point here is that God’s pruning and sanctifying work in us is a process that He intends to take time.
 - (1) Of course, we can, by our own foolish and uncooperative choices, extend the time it takes to become an abundant fruit bearer. But we don’t have and we ought not.
 - (2) Which is why Peter writes in **1 Peter 2:2**, we are to be like newborn babies **longing for** the pure milk of God’s word, so that by the power and influence of God’s word in our lives we may may grow in respect to salvation.
4. The point is that there are no quick fixes, no immediate and complete changes, no magic wand transformations, just progressive growth toward being conformed to the likeness of Jesus and becoming holy in all our behavior as God is holy. Therefore, be like those who hunger and thirst for this kind of growth, and who cooperatively persevere with God’s progressive work in you.

- C. And now we come to **John 15:4-5**, where Jesus says, “Abide in Me, and I [will abide] in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so 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, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”
1. I want to begin by pointing out three similar statements, two of which appear in these two verses and one in vs 7.
 - a. In **vs 4**, Jesus says, “**Abide in Me, and I (will abide) in you.**”
 - b. And in **vs 5**, He says, “**he who abides in Me and I in him.**”
 - c. And in **vs 7**, Jesus says, “**If you abide in Me, and (if) My words abide in you.**”
 - d. What I want you to see is that within the span of four verses we see three statements that clearly state (1) who is to do what, and (2) the order in which each one is to do it.
 2. Lets begin with who is to do what.
 - a. The phrases “abide in Me,” and “he who abides in Me,” and “If you abide in Me,” refers to you and me. They clearly tell us what we are to do – which according to the context means we are to abide in or remain firmly connected to Jesus – who is the vine and therefore our source of life.
 - b. The phrases “and I in you,” and “I in him,” and “My words abide in you,” clearly tell us what Jesus, our vine and life source, will do – which according to the context means that as our source of life, He will continuously make it possible for us to bear fruit (**vs 4**), to bear much fruit (**vs 5**), and to do for us whatever we ask Him to do (**vs 7**).
 - (1) And without question, we need this source of life because as Jesus said, “The branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me” (**vs 4**).
 - (2) And in **vs 5**, Jesus said that “apart from [Him] you can do nothing.”
 - (3) In other words, we cannot come to that condition, that state of being, whereby we are truly holy in our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds apart from the life of Jesus Christ flowing into us and through us.
 - c. Now, should any problem arise in gaining the desired results of this relationship between the vine and the branch, that is, between you and me as Christians and Jesus as our source of life,

the problem will always be with the branch – which means the problem is always with you and me.

- d. And why is the problem always be with us? Because our live source, who is Jesus Christ, is perfectly holy, unfailingly loving, entirely wise, all-powerful, and therefore able to supply all we need to bear an abundance of good fruit.
3. The truth I long for us to clearly see and unquestionably trust is that God never fails! He is perfectly good. Therefore, I encourage you to assume that this is true in the same confident way you assume on getting up in the morning that there will be sufficient oxygen in the air for you to breath all day.
 - a. And why does this matter? There are several reasons, but let me give you just one that is in keeping with the fact that the only problems in bearing fruit lies with the branch and not the vine.
 - b. Once you conclude that God is perfectly good and therefore He never fails, you will stop blaming God or using God as some kind of excuse for your failings as a branch, and you will than look only at yourself to see what there is in you or about you that is getting in the way of bearing good fruit.
 - c. This concludes my focus on **who does what**.
 4. Now lets turn our attention to **the order in which each one is to do** what each one does.
 - a. In all three verses (**vs 4,5,7**), the phrase begins with us and ends with God and Jesus. In other words, abiding begins with us, the branches, and not with the vine.
 - (1) Now I grant you that this is only one side of a two sided coin. And I will get to the other side in a moment so that we can keep all that God says in perspective.
 - (2) Nevertheless, according to Jesus' own words, which are the words God told Him so speak, we must abide in the vine in order for the life of the vine to flow into and through us.
 - (3) In other words, we must abide in the vine in order to bear good fruit (**vs 4**), and to bear an abundance of fruit (**vs 5**), and to receive whatever we ask (**vs 7**).
 - b. This picture of the order in which who is to do what is not unique to **John 15**. Let me give you just three other examples from God's word which portray the same picture.
 - (1) **Malachi 3:7** . . . From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them.

Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.

(2) **James 4:8 . . . Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.**

(3) **James 4:10 . . . Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.**

- c. My purpose in pointing this out is to encourage you to do that which God has told you to do so that you can gain the fullest possible help, empowerment, transformation, and blessings **from God doing** what He said He will do.
5. Now as I stated a bit earlier, there is another side to this just like there are two sides to a number of other truths in God's word, such as the eternal security / losing your salvation issue and the sovereignty of God / free will of man issue.
- a. Jesus himself points out the side of God acting first when He says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (**John 6:44**).
 - b. And in **John 12:32**, Jesus says, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all men to Myself."
 - c. And let us not neglect Paul's word in **Romans 1:18-20**, where Paul says that "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, [19] **because** that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them (*He acted first*). [20] For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made (*again He acted first*), so that they are without excuse.
 - d. Therefore, let us not pick one side over the other or neglect one side in favor of the other. Rather let us live as those who know we cannot bear fruit without the life of the vine flowing into us, just as we cannot bear fruit without abiding in the vine.
- D. I want to make one last point about the necessity of abiding in the vine and having the life of the vine flowing into and through us in order to bear good fruit and an abundance of good fruit.
- 1. Our relationship with the vine is nothing more or less than Jesus' relationship with the Father. And this is an important truth.
 - a. For example, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father

doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (**John 5:19**).

- b. And again, Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me” (**John 8:28**).
2. In other words, Jesus is not asking us or telling us to live any differently in our relationship to God than He lived in His earthly relation to God.
- a. Now when we examine Jesus’ life and consider what it cost Him to live this way, we might be inclined to take another, easier path. For the reality is, at least from the world’s perspective, Jesus paid a dear price, not just at the end of His life, but from His birth to His ascension back into heaven.
 - b. However, when we look at the complete picture of Jesus’ life, we see that He never lost more than He gained. He never paid more than God returned or rewarded. And He never wound up worse for living the very same way He is asking us to live, but rather He wound up better. And so will we if we abide in the vine and cooperate with the vinedresser.

III. Conclusion

- A. It is true, abiding in the vine in such a way that allows the life of the vine to flow into and through us, can be hard, demanding, and sometimes wearying. Being pruned in order to bear an abundance of good fruit can be painful.
- B. However, the outcome will always exceed the cost and the pain by so much that upon looking back you will be thankful for the cost and the pain. The rewards of righteousness and intimate fellowship with God are such that the cost and pain to gain them become inconsequential by comparison.