

AM John 15:1-6 What is your relationship with Christ?

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Preacher: Mr Thomson McKenzie

[0 : 00] From John chapter 15, verses 1 to 6. John 15, verses 1 to 6.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you, as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine.

Neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

For apart from me you can do nothing. If anything does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch, and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

[1 : 20] Thanks be to God for the reading of his holy word, and his name be the glory and praise forever. Amen. Let's briefly bow our heads in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the gift of your word. As we look at it now, may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable in your sights.

Our Saviour and our Redeemer. Amen. So today, we're looking obviously at the final I am saying of Jesus in John 15 verses 1 to 6.

And with the events of the last few years through COVID, society was seen as being central to the nation's response.

As people came together to meet the needs of their communities. And it seems that people started to realise that we're not so autonomous as perhaps we'd like to think we were.

[2 : 36] We perhaps had been starting to think that each of us were an island, each of us pursued our own goals, but suddenly we realised we relied on each other.

But this morning's passage also brings into perspective the fact that far more important is the need to rely on God and to be linked to Jesus Christ.

We're not created to be self-sufficient, but created to be connected to each other and to be connected to God through his Son. This morning's reading is part of the discourse at the Last Supper.

So it's a lengthy discourse that Jesus has with his disciples starting in chapter 13 and going right through into the next chapter. From the parable that we've read today, we can see that there are three purposes that Christ has in comparing himself to the vine.

First is we have no power to do good except through Christ. We cannot bear any useful fruit for him if we are not rooted in Christ.

[3 : 58] We have a root in him that we are cultivated by the Father. It's he who will shape us into what he requires.

He is the one who removes the unfruitful branches. And those who are not in Christ will be thrown out and burned. So let's look at these points individually as we go through the passage.

Verse 1 starts immediately with, I am the true vine. The last, as we said, of those I am sayings. In the use of I am sayings, Jesus is creating a direct link between God and himself.

In John 8, 58, Jesus himself says of himself, Before Abraham was, I am. And this was a phrase that we know was well known to the Jews, which they associated with God.

So straight away, they realised that Jesus was aligning himself with God. And they were unhappy about that. That's why back in John 8, chapter 8, verse 59, we realised that the people understood the relevance of what he was saying, and people were ready to stone him.

[5 : 23] But why does he use the image of the vine? Well, the image of the vine was probably used by Jesus because the people, the Jews, would have been well, would have been familiar with the image of the vine and the vineyards from the Old Testament to refer to Israel itself.

As Jews, it's an imagery that the disciples would have been familiar with and that they would have known. In the previous I am statements, Jesus had not simply countered false teachings.

But he had shown himself to be the complete item. So he wasn't just sort of countering what the Pharisees were misleading the people with, but he was shown how he was the true way.

That he was the truth in the life. If we think back, Jesus was the true bread. He was not merely the manna that God had provided for the people in the wilderness.

not simply a food which would meet their fleeting meal that would sorry, my throat was really dry this morning, it was really warm up here.

[6 : 46] So, so, true bread is not merely manna. Right? He gives eternal life, not just fills a fleeting hunger but the bread that God gave the people in the wilderness.

In John 8, 12, Jesus states, I am the light of the world. Yes, as opposed to the darkness of sin but also as the complete light of the world.

You know, in John 1, 9, it's written, the true light which enlightens everyone was human to the world. The theme of being the complete item is continued in the image of Jesus as the vine.

The image of Jesus as the real vine fits with the contrast of Israel as the vine in the Old Testament. Scripture and its image of Israel as the vine is often related to its failure to be fruitful for God.

And this is clearly reflected in Isaiah verses 1 to 7. God had created a vineyard, prepared it with care, had planted it with the finest vines but it gave wild fruits.

[8 : 02] As a result, God laid it desolate. If we turn to Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1 to 7 and we'll just read them together. So Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1 to 7.

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines.

He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. And he looked for it to yield grapes but it yielded wild grapes. And now inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah judged between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When he looked for it to yield grapes why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured. I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled down. And I will make it a waste.

[9 : 16] It shall not be pruned or hoed and briars and thorns shall grow up. I will also command the clouds that the rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And to look for justice but hold bloodshed. For righteousness but hold but behold an outcry.

As a result of the vine's inability to bear good fruit the vineyard is laid desolate. And Isaiah is clear who the vine and the vineyard represent.

They represent a fallen and wayward Israel. While if we look at how God describes Jesus at his baptism in the river Jordan we see something in complete contrast.

In Matthew 12 18 he writes Behold my servant whom I have chosen my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

[10 : 23] Mark 1 11 says of the same incident and the same event and the voice came from heaven you are my beloved son and I with you am well pleased.

And similarly in Luke 3 22 you are my beloved son with you I am well pleased. God declares his pleasure in his son and how he has performed his decrees.

Jesus through it all never parts from God's ways unlike the people of Israel. The people of Israel deserted God repeatedly to go their own way.

But Jesus knowing from the beginning where his journey would take him obeys God and goes all the way to Calvary to die for our sins. So already there is a lot in this verse but that is only the first part of the first verse.

Secondly we read that God is a vine dresser so it should be no surprise that if you have vines or plants to grow that there is a gardener.

[11 : 33] It is to be expected that the gardener would tend and ensure the growth of the plant but significantly is the statement that God my father is the one who attends to the task.

Jesus is to the fore throughout this passage but God his father is in the background. They have different roles but they are inseparable reflecting Jesus' statement in John 14 11.

Believe me that I am in the father and the father is in me. The two are inseparable and we will see that again later on. Verse 2 the vine dresser or gardener has two tasks.

The first is the removal of all fruitless branches and then to prune the healthy branches to bear more fruit. The actions of the gardener appear decisive as he tends to the vine and in line with other gospels every fruitless branch is removed.

Now for some today they would see only one side of God a God who is benevolent and kind and to them this seems harsh that the God of love would remove anyone from union with Christ.

[12 : 57] After all did God not send his son to save the world and not to condemn it? Well that's true. God did send his son to save the world not to condemn it.

But people often misinterpret the meanings of the verse. The Greek word for cut is *arō* and it could have a number of different meanings.

But here in verse 6 we have read it to mean to cut out to remove. But for some who see this as a distortion who think that God loves everyone which he does but that God will save everyone regardless of their actions and regardless of their beliefs.

They see it rather meaning to that God will lift up and that he will tend to them. And that they believe makes for better gardening and therefore better theology.

They suggest the sentence should read every branch in me that does not bear fruit he lifts up. So that would be that he keeps it from trailing in the ground. It's about the care of the vine lifting up the branch so that the new growth may be open to the sun and bring forth fruit.

- [14 : 23] They find it strange that a gardener would begin by cutting out a fruitless branch without giving it a chance to develop. That a loving God would give people every opportunity to develop.

In the way of the world this sounds completely rational. if we have a one-sided image of God a one-dimensional image that God is love and nothing else but rather God in his covenant with man is a God both of love and of justice.

He is a perfect balance. So let's look back at that gardening analogy that people seem to have met certain parts of gardening.

When we think of gardening we think of the gardener who will cut on sight what he sees as diseased branches such as canker branches.

They are immediately cut out and they are burned before they infect other branches. We have briars growing in bushes which are promptly cut out to stop them from sapping the strength from the plant.

- [15 : 36] If we look to Romans 9 6 Paul writes for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. Remember Jesus had challenged the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders for their poor leadership of his people.

Paul teaches us of the false teachers who come from within our own midst and appear as if in Christ. But their teachings and their actions show otherwise.

In Acts 20 28-30 Paul writes pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

To care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock.

From among your own cells will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. So here we see that there will be those who appear to be in Christ.

- [16 : 44] There are those who appear to be in the branches that appear to be in the vine. But those whose motives is to disrupt the church and disrupt God's teachings.

We see it further in 2 Peter and in Jude. Though being spiritually fruitless need not be as extreme as false teachings. Rather those to whom the gospel is preached are divided into two groups.

Those who accept Jesus' teachings and those who do not even if they do appear close to Jesus. And this can be seen in the events earlier in the evening of the Last Supper.

If we look back to chapter 13 when Jesus states that one of the disciples will betray him. he was already aware of Judas' later actions.

Judas, an apostle, one of Jesus' chosen in a circle, appeared to his fellow man as though he was beyond reproach. And yet, in what role did he play amongst the disciples?

- [17 : 52] He was the treasurer, the keeper of the purse, trusted beyond all doubt by the group. However, his heart was not true to Jesus, but to worldly gain for his own self interest.

Where does our heart lie? Where does your heart and my heart lie? Judas would betray the one who loved him and called him for his own gain.

Those not in Jesus Christ falsely profess a Christian virtues for gain. Calvin aptly asks, can anyone who is engrafted in into Christ be without fruit?

Calvin asks, if we are truly in Christ, does our life show the fruits of Christ? What of the branches that bear fruit?

What of the believer who shows the fruits of the Spirit? Do we just go on regardless in life? No. Jesus states that every branch that bears fruit is pruned.

[19 : 01] Remember, if we go back to the analogy of the gardener, the mindful gardener does not simply cut out the rotten and fruitless branches. He tends and grows the fruitful branches.

So for those who are fruitful, life does not go on regardless. But we have here a vision of discipline and cleansing to ensure greater fruitfulness.

The pruning or cutting back can appear harsh and it sounds counterproductive. It can involve cutting back branches and the training of branches to provide more fruits.

If we think of a saying that my father used to have when it came to his roses that he should get his enemy to cut his roses back to prune them. Because the harsher the pruning, the more fruitful the flowers will be in the following season.

So the pruning means a change in our lives. God chooses us as we are but his Holy Spirit looks to renew us, to sanctify us and to make us free from sin.

[20 : 10] And so more Christ like. But because of our fallen nature this is a lifelong journey. It's not a quick fix. We are in a constant battle against sin.

This pruning of sin from our lives leads us to share with the disciples the cleansing through God's word, through Christ's teachings and faith in him.

Again we shall see that all who are close to Jesus are not necessarily in him. And we contrast verse 3 with John 13 10.

Jesus says of his disciples that they are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. They have heard God's word preached through Jesus.

They have accepted Jesus' message and their faith is in him. Even though at this stage there's still parts they do not understand fully.

[21 : 13] But in John 13 10 we read Jesus said to them the one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet but is completely clean and you are clean but not every one of you.

Here Jesus is starting to wash the feet of his disciples and Peter says no Lord do not wash my feet and Jesus says well yeah I am this needs to happen.

This is going to happen and John says to him well not just my feet but all of me needs washed and Jesus says well no if you are already bathed you are clean it is only your feet that need washed because of the sandals and the dirty roads the dusty roads.

So we have here Jesus said not only the feet required but he is already telling us that somebody would betray him he was already talking that somebody was unclean and that is Judas.

Jesus highlights that one of his closest confidence is not in faith in him. He has heard his teachings both in public and in private yet he does not accept Christ as his master.

[22 : 36] So the question is are we cleansed? Do we have faith in Christ as our saviour? are we cleansed by the blood that he shed at Calvary for us for you and for I?

Or are we like Judas in self promotion and looking after our own self interests? God's word, God's scripture is the pruning shears as we learn in 2 Timothy 3 16-17 all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent equipped for every good work.

From this it will bring about internal change for those in faith in Christ and which in turn should lead to the evidence of spiritual fruits in the Christian life as outlined by Paul in Galatians 5 22-23 as we were saying last week to the young people this means that the fruits that we should show in their lives are love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness greatness sorry gentleness and self control that's why I wrote it in last week so I got it right verse 4 and 5 Jesus gives the commands that we are to abide in him that he may abide in us and goes on to give an explanation of his command he says abide in me and I in you as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine and neither can you unless you abide in me

I am the vine you are the branches whoever abides in me and I in him he it is that bears much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing in verse 4 Jesus gives the command that the disciples are to abide in him and I in you meaning that they should live in such a way that he will continue to abide in them and the two abidings cannot be separated the abiding is a prerequisite of fruitfulness we have to be in Christ and Christ has to be able to remain in us if we are not in Christ Christ cannot be in us and we cannot be fruitful we are saved by grace but a man is liable for leading a life that keeps himself in Christ and Christ in him without man's exertion there is no salvation now that starts to sound like we can be in control of our own salvation but it's not that power of exertion comes through

Christ alone and it comes from God we are saved by his grace and it is by God's grace it is his mercy that we have the ability to continue in faith without the twin abiding man cannot be just fruits of the spirit just as a branch cannot produce grapes if it's separated from the vine one must live in the other they have to be linked together as Jesus is fulfillment of the image of the vineyard so the Christian must be the fruitful community of God in place of the corrupt and degenerate men of Judah to ensure this there must be an ongoing pruning to ensure good works to ensure fruit as Calvin says believers need incessant culture that they may be prevented from degenerating and they produce nothing good unless

[26 : 34] God continually applies his hand so Calvin telling us that we need incessant culture we need nurturing and we need pruning we need to grow and we need the discipline of good living we need the things that are wrong highlighted and taken out of our lives God the father the fine dresser continues his work in us through his holy spirit and to our last days as believers remain in Christ they become fruitful in ways the Israelites never were in verse 5 Jesus gives an explanation to our fruitfulness he starts by mirroring the start of verse 1 and goes on to reemphasize the task of bearing fruit or rather much fruit in verse 5 can only be completed by remaining in the vine do we act as though we are always led by

Jesus that he is at the centre of our lives and giving purpose to our every action whether a thief or a philosopher we can do no work that is acceptable to God as it falls short we can never please God by our own actions so outside of the vine outside of Jesus we can do nothing of value we cannot please God and we most certainly cannot earn our own salvation yet how often do we as humans try how often do we set God aside and have our own plan of how things should be done so Jesus finishes the verse with the repeat of the warning in verse 4 that apart from me you can do nothing in verse 6 Jesus now is clear and the consequences are not being attached to him and bearing spiritual fruit if anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers and the branches are gathered thrown into the fire and burned so

Jesus has contrasted throughout the passage two types of branches one bears spiritual fruit the other does not one is cleansed by Jesus word the other is not one one one accepts the message of Christ and so remains in him and is saved the other rejects Jesus message so is not in him and condemns himself he's too busy or he doesn't see it as relevant to his life he's responsible for his own condemnation where are we these are real choices that we are to make and should reflect in our daily lives if we're in the vine we should give spiritual fruits our lives our interactions our words our behaviour should reflect

Christ and his care for the world and the desire to share his message not always someone standing up here preaching but even in the simple cup of tea with friends or neighbours let's pray father we thank you that you have given us the gift of your son that through him we see the complete image we see that Christ is the way the truth and the life that there is no other way to you and if we are to provide spiritual fruits it's not enough just to speak with our mouth that we have accepted Christ but we have to show it in our hearts because it is our hearts which you know truly fill our mouths it's our hearts that will bring spiritual fruit if we plant ourselves in

Christ for those Lord who still question whether they can earn their own salvation whether Jesus is relevant to their lives we ask Lord that you pour out your grace upon them that they will see how merciful you have been to them and they will see that through you son their sins are forgiven and only through him and faith in him can they come to you and have eternal life these things we ask through Christ our Lord and Savior Amen