

Parable Of The Sower

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[0 : 00] Reading the parable of the vineyard from Isaiah chapter 5, let me sing for my beloved a 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, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?

When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? Now I 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. I will make it a waste and it shall not be pruned or hoed.

[1 : 03] And briars and thorns shall grow up. And I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah.

And his pleasant planting, they are his pleasant planting. And he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed.

For righteousness, but behold, a cry. Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.

The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing, surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses without inhabitants. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and an homer of seed shall yield but an ephah.

That means ten acres yields a gallon, basically. Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drinks, who tarry late in the evening till wine inflames them.

[2 : 21] They have lyre and harp, timbrel and flute, and wine at their feet, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord or see the work of his hands.

So it looks very much like the story of a good plan that failed, a good investment that didn't produce. Well, then if you look at Psalm 80, you see another Old Testament picture of the psalm, and it comes out in Psalm 80, verse 8 following.

Psalm 80, verse 9, Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt. Thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.

Thou didst clear the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches.

[3 : 23] It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the river. Why then hast thou broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field, feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts.

Look down from heaven and see. Have regard for this vine, the stalk which thy right hand has planted. They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down.

May they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. So those are two pictures of vines that failed, and one picture you can see.

And the picture is of the vine that filled the whole land, but then it was broken down. And so it wasn't a beautiful thing at all. I suppose if you've traveled in California or the Niagara Peninsula or the interior of B.C.

[4 : 25] and seen great vineyards, you could have a picture of how much care is put into them and what's involved in it. So that it's with this background, the background of what vineyards look like, the background of what's written in Isaiah, the background of what's written in the Psalms, is that

Jesus takes his disciples at a very critical point.

Now, in order to understand this, you've got to understand the change in venue, as they say. Because what happened this morning was there was a great crowd of people to which Jesus wanted to talk so that every one of them could get hold of him.

Now there is a very small crowd of people, just his disciples, and he's talking to them. This morning it was the great panorama of the kingdom of God and how in time and history it would be established.

And right now it's talking in a very particular way about what is going to be demanded of you if you want to belong to that kingdom, if you want to be part of that kingdom.

And it's not only, it's this morning we talked about salvation and how God works in our hearts to bring us to himself, to bring us new life.

[5 : 54] And now it talks about how we are to go on in that faith and what happens as you try to go on. So you're looking at John chapter 15 and it says, Jesus turns to the disciples and he knows that they've read Psalm 80 and he knows that they've read Isaiah 15 and he gives them an allegory.

And an allegory, it's sort of like a parable, but it's describing one thing in order that you might understand something else that's very like it.

And so he uses the story of the vine and the vineyard in order to describe something about the disciples' relationship to him.

And remember that they are going to go through what must be the most traumatic event in their lives. And he's telling them how they're going to survive in this situation.

This is a story not of planting this time, but of survival. Ken Nicholson told me this morning a little statement with you.

[7 : 15] Ken, I may have to come back to you on it, but that it says, the Vikings were made by the North Wind. That's a hard way of making a people, but that was how the Vikings were made.

They used the North Wind and built a great civilization. Somebody was saying that in Northern Europe there are great stone monuments that predate even the pyramids.

But way back then, these people were created by this. And this is a hard story of how God is going to sustain and keep his church and what's demanded of it.

And so, just look at it. As Christ turns to his disciples on the eve of this tremendous, traumatic experience they're about to face and says, I am the true vine.

My father is the vine dresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit. He takes away. Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit.

[8 : 29] You are already made clean by the word which I've spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you as the 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. He who abides in me and I in him.

He it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers.

And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me and my word abides in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you.

By this my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the father has led me, so have I loved you.

[9 : 39] Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

So what I want you to do now is take these three stories of the vine, the vine in Isaiah, the vine in the Psalms, and then Christ saying, I am the true vine.

These are just pictures. Now is the reality and this reality concerns me and you, Christ says to his disciples. So what I want you to do is take these verses which happened to be 15, 1 to 11 and in your groups look at it carefully enough and we'll put it on the screen here so you can see it and take it and pick out of it six words that you think characterize the relationship between Christ and his disciples.

Just six words and you don't have to take the words from here because the words don't necessarily appear here but they are, I mean, one of the words might be fruitfulness for instance.

Well, that's something that characterizes the relationship between Christ and his disciples. Now what we want is to get six words out of each group and then what we want you to do when you've got those six words is state what is the opposite to those six words.

[11:33] Do you follow me? We want you to say what those six words are and then we want you to state what is opposite to those six words. Then when you've done that, put them on a piece of paper and give them to me and we'll carry on.

Okay? So, again, John, can you magically transform us into six groups looking for six words? But I, you're by and large a great disappointment to me and I, but, you see, what I, what I wanted you to do, I mean, this isn't what I wanted you to do, what I thought you might do is see that our sort of contemporary way of life is really, in many ways kind of polar opposites to what is taught in John 15. But I think you all turned out to be way too religious and you made everything in John 15 good and everything that was opposite bad.

But if you take something like this is the kind of thing I thought you might come up with, that while it has a strong doctrine of dependency, in our society we live with a strong doctrine of self-reliance rather than dependency.

Where it has, where it talks about discipline we consider that to be the opposite of freedom.

Freedom. Yeah.

[13:17] I don't know. Well, now that all my basic assumptions are wrong, it's somewhat difficult to go on with this.

But maybe, yeah. Mr. Beckman, you made a very good point.

And I am happy to be flattened by it. Can I...

Can I... Can I go on just like we hadn't done that at all? I have a picture for you, which I think...

I don't know what you can do with this one. But what it is, is... This is a picture of the world or God...

[14:40] Now, that's because I was asked to make it as a circle rather than to put it off or up or anywhere else that's there.

And man is... Right here. Now, when he comes into conscious existence, if you can...

The thing that he's very conscious of is the world around him. And the God who created him and the source of life and all these things. So that he works on the question, on the basis that, in terms of God, he is...

And the question that confronts him is... You can't read this, but I'll interpret it for you anyway. Who am I? Now, that's one way of looking at it.

There's another way of looking at it, and it's like this. There's a very tenuous line around here.

[15:49] When this says, I am... Who is he? You know... And there's a... It's a different kind of a world, you've got to admit.

And one of the things that happens when you read John 15 is... That it's based on this kind of a world. That the real question is to discover who I am.

But in our society, we live in this kind of a world. Who I am, I know. Who God is, I'm very doubtful about indeed. And so you find... That's why I thought...

Except for Paul Beck. I thought you would think otherwise. So that... There you are. So what happens then is...

This seems to me, John 15, to be a very hard picture. And I want this to tell you what I think it is in fairly brief terms.

[16:51] And these are the brief terms in which I want to tell you what I think it is. There's a peculiarity about... About John's gospel.

And that is that it doesn't... Most of the preaching you hear on the meaning of the Holy Communion comes from John's gospel.

I am the bread. I am the vine. I am the water of life. The picture of Christ imparting himself to his people. Most of those pictures come from the gospel of John.

But the thing that doesn't happen in the gospel of John anywhere... Is the recording of the Last Supper... As being a sacrament that we are to observe.

Now what I think happens is... That John describes the significance of the communion... In John chapter 15.

[17:56] What we've just read is John's picture of the communion service. Now all of you who are well brought up in the prayer book...

You'll know that communion is a sacrament. And a sacrament is... The story of... The bread and the wine.

And these are the outward and visible signs of it. And Christian life has been organized by ecclesiastical politicians...

Around these two things. So that you've got to go to communion at least once a week. And you've got to receive this. And all the rules of ecclesiastical life...

Come from the outward and visible. And so the outward and visible structure of the church...

Happens to be around these things. Now what it says in the prayer book about...

[18 : 58] The communion. Is that it is the outward and visible sign... Of an inward and spiritual reality. So while the other three gospels lay down...

What the outward and visible sign should be... Of Christ taking the bread and breaking it in the wine... And pouring it out and sharing it with his disciples... What John's gospel does...

Is to tell you what the meaning of that is. So that he puts all the emphasis on... The inward and spiritual reality of it. Rather than the outward and visible sign.

And of course as you know... The big problem of our Christian life... As it's seen by the world around us... Is that it's all outward and visible...

And very little inward and spiritual. And so what Christ is doing to us in this... In the picture of the vine and the branches...

[20 : 00] Is to tell you how this happens. How that... What is demanded of a Christian... Is that he be in union with Christ.

That he doesn't have any existence... Apart from Christ. And he doesn't have any purpose... Apart from... From fruitfulness.

There isn't one. Now I had thought... That that concept would be unacceptable to you. And that you would have difficulty with it.

Because... When you go through this verse... Or these verses... You find that they are... Very hard verses indeed. And they describe...

They describe... Pruning and cutting... And cleansing and burning... All those things come out as pictures... And a kind of almost... Fanatical commitment...

[21 : 01] To the end product... Which is fruitfulness. And that... That becomes... The picture by which...

Christ says... That disciples... That disciples... Are going to be... Going to have to live their lives. And he promises them... Implicitly in what he says...

A good deal of... Personal... Suffering. And he knows... What they're going to face. And... It raises for us...

In a peculiar way... The reality of suffering... In the life of a Christian. The whole picture of... Cleansing... And...

Crooning... And burning... Are all... Are all pictures... Of... The discipline of... Suffering...

[22 : 00] Which is going to fall upon those... Who are the disciples of Christ... And that their... Only way... Of survival... Will be that they are...

United to Christ... As... Branches are to the vine. If they don't abide in him... Then they're simply not... Going to be able...

To make it. That is going to be... The very... Source... Of their life. And if they get out of touch... With the source of their life... They're completely useless.

Useless. There isn't any possibility... Of meaningful existence... Going on for them... Out of touch... With that source. Now that's...

A very powerful picture... As you've got to admit. And it's a powerful picture... Because it... It talks about these things... In such... In such strong terms.

[22 : 56] Well... What... What happens... As the result of this... Is that you look at... The reality of... Suffering in the world...

And... We... Organize our lives... Again... As I was trying to imply... In this... Breakdown... We organize our lives... Around...

The avoidance of suffering... Some way in which... We don't have to... Recognize it... We don't have to come to terms with it... We try and organize our lives...

In that way... And in order to do that... We come up with... What I call... Short term solutions...

In order to... Get around... The problem of suffering... In our lives... And of course... The greatest... Short term solution... Is that ultimately...

[23 : 52] You will come to regard... Your life... As a kind of... Short term event... That is... It has a beginning... It has an end... And as long as you can get through... Without too much trouble... You're well off... And it's only when...

Somebody comes along... And says that it goes on... And on... And on... And on... That you begin to think... Well... Maybe... Short term solutions... Aren't good enough...

But if... Our life... Is really only a short term experience... Then short term solutions... Will do... But what Christ... Is trying to teach us... Here...

Is that... In the course of our life... God is trying to work out... Some long term... Solutions... To short term problems... So that he says...

Throatfulness... And pruning... And suffering... And cleansing... And burning... All those things... Are part of... The discipline... That is required...

[24 : 47] As we... Live... In total dependence... Upon Christ... In order that we can... That God can work out in us... The long term solution...

Of the short term problem... That is you and me... And... And our willfulness... And our self-centeredness... And of our concept of...

Of freedom... As being opposite the discipline... You know... That's... Those kinds of things... And God is trying to work them out... Now... Well... How this... Ultimately ends up...

In John chapter 15... Is that... It talks there... About... Joy... Joy... And... Joy is...

Is a very important... New Testament word... And... John 15... This section... Ends in verse 11...

[25 : 41] By saying... These things... I have spoken to you... That my joy... May be in you... And that your joy...

May be full... Okay... Now... There's a lovely story... Written by one of the leaders... Of the L'Arche movement...

Called... Enough Room for Joy... And it's the story... Of... A retarded adult... And I've told you this... Lots of times... But I don't mind telling you again...

A retarded adult... On a huge... Sandy beach... Perhaps out here... In the summertime... When the tide's gone... All the way out... And... The leader... Said to him...

Would you please... Draw a picture... Of the sun... And so on this... Huge beach... He took a stick... And he drew a great... Big circle...

[26 : 36] And that's the sun... And he said... To the retarded adult... Would you draw... A picture... Of joy... And he looked up...

And down the beach... Like this... And he said... There's not enough room... Now... That is the kind of... Concept of joy...

Which I think... We need to understand... And... What it means is... And I want... As the sort of... Climax of this teaching...

In John 15 is... The discovery... Of the things... That apparently... Lead to happiness... Don't get you there...

In other words... When you make the choices... Which apparently... Lead to happiness... The experience of man... Is that they...

[27 : 29] Don't get you there... While the things... That don't... Apparently... Lead to joy... In fact... Do get you there... And that's why...

This teaching... Ends up with this... Paradoxical statement... That... These things... I have spoken to you... That your joy... That...

My joy may be in you... And that your joy may be full... Because... The very things... That... That you find here... And you've... Identified them as...

Pruning... Abiding... Fruitfulness... Agreement... Discipline... Dependence... Nurturing... And this process...

Of... Cleansing... Burning... Pairing... Cutting... And removing... The dead wood... All the time... The terrible discipline... To which the good...

[28 : 23] Vine dresser... Subjects the vine... And the branches... Is the discipline... Which becomes... The long-term process... By which...

We are... Brought to joy... To our great... Surprise... And that's why... This... This story... Unlike the story... This morning...

Which talks about... The beginning of our... Christian life... This talks about... The process of going... On in it... And... How you go on... In dependence...
Upon... Christ... And in... Living touch... With him... And I think that's where... That's where our churches...
Tend to break down... You know... And if we look at our own parish... And examine it... That that is... The responsibility... Of us all...
[29 : 18] To be... In Christ... To be... Abiding in him... To maintain... That relationship... And what the structure... And organization...
Of the church is for... Is to give you... The means by which you may... Continue... Continue... To support... And encourage one another...
To abide in him... To give you the awareness... Of the reality of... His long-term purpose... In your life... Over against which you examine...
All the sort of short-term... Objectives of your life... And allow yourself... To be subjected to that process... Which is involved... In Jesus' teaching...
In John 15... One last thing... That I want just to say... Remember I said to you... That this is Jesus teaching... To his disciples... And... And they're facing...
[30 : 14] A very difficult time... And... And I... You see... I think that...
We have to somehow... Come to terms with that reality... And that is... That God's purpose... In our lives... Is a long-term purpose...
To... To deal with... The series of short-term crises... That our lives... Are made up of... And to keep that...
Picture in perspective... And that the teaching... The fundamental teaching... Of this passage... Is to make us aware of... To make us aware... That our life...
Is not to be... Built on... Maintaining the outward... And visible signs... Simply... But that the outward...
[31 : 09] And visible signs... Is the evidence of... The inner and spiritual reality... In our... Hearts and lives... Together... That this inward...
And spiritual reality... Is the part of the iceberg... That's below the surface... And this outward... Invisible sign... Is just a little bit...
Of the iceberg... That breaks the surface... So John's gospel... Talks about that reality... In the profundity... Of the picture... That he gives us...
In this chapter...