

Scripture Portraits of the Church - The True Vine and the Branches

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Date: 13 November 2022

[0 : 00] 189, Tunis Highland Cathedral. I will exalt you, O my God and King. Forever I will praise your holy name. I will extol your name forevermore. Day after day your praise I will proclaim.

Great is the Lord, most worthy of all praise. His greatness none can search or comprehend. Each generation will recount your deeds, and to the next your mighty acts commend.

Psalm 145, verses 1-7. We'll stand to sing. Forever I will praise your holy name forevermore. Day after day your praise I will proclaim.

Great is the Lord, most worthy of all praise. His greatness none can search or comprehend. Each generation will recount your deeds, and to the next your mighty acts commend.

[1 : 48] May praise the splendor of your majesty. The power of the works that you have done. I do will meditate upon your deeds, and your majestic acts I will make known.

They will rejoice in your benevolence, and your abundant grace they'll celebrate.

Their righteousness that you have shown today. In grace and joyful song they will relay.

Let's unite now in a brief word of prayer. Lord, our gracious God, our heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity once again of being together in this place of worship.

We give thanks, Lord, for these words that we have been singing, reminding us of how much we need to be thankful when we recollect the goodness of God to us.

[3 : 33] And we thank you for this, Lord, and we thank you for this opportunity of expressing our thanks for your goodness through praise and adoration of your name.

Bless us here, we pray. Bless us here, we pray. Bless the children. And we ask, O Lord, that your blessing will always be with them. And we pray that you would bless to them the teaching they receive from your Word.

Lord, we ask that you would apply it to their heart even in their youngest days. We pray that they may learn to walk in your ways day by day. We pray for your protective care over them.

We pray that you would give to them, Lord, that inwardly and outwardly they may know of your own provision and care for them. And we commend them today to you and ask that you would bless them.

Be with us now, we pray, in the remainder of our service. And throughout this day, we ask it all in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Okay, children, well, as you know, we had a minute's silence there because this is Remembrance Sunday.

[4 : 47] And on Remembrance Sunday, we remember those who died in the wars that took place, well, really since the First World War especially, and the Second World War and other wars since then, many people died saving our nation, our country.

And if you were looking at watching the remembrance ceremony yesterday, last night, the Festival of Remembrance from the Albert Hall, you'll have remembered that one particular phrase was frequently used there by those who spoke.

Just three words, and I'd like your children to remember these three words today, as well as ourselves as adults, because they don't just refer to what happened in these wars that we remember.

However, it's also three words that also apply very much to the Christian life. And the three words are service before self. Service before self.

In other words, we, rather than just focus selfishly on ourselves, we think of our service to others. Jesus is the great example of service before self.

[6 : 04] Because although He was the Son of God, the Bible tells us many times that He came into this world to be a servant to God the Father. And that as a servant, He put others before Himself.

He gave Himself to suffering, to temptation, even to the death that He died on the cross because of His love for His people.

It was always for Jesus, service before self. And that is what you find with those who gave their lives as they served their country.

They were proud to serve their country. They went to war seeking to support their country in standing for freedom and in trying to remove those who had come to invade other countries, such as in the world wars, such as you find even just now in Ukraine.

Service before self is something that all service people put to themselves and are pleased to actually say this is how they try to live their lives as well.

[7 : 15] But it also applies to the Christian life. Because we follow the example of Jesus when we put service before self.

Our primary responsibility and delight is to serve God. We put the service of God before our own selfish pleasures.

God always comes first if we're really following the teaching of the Bible as to what a Christian life is about. We always think of serving God before we think of anything for ourselves, selfishly or personally.

And it's our great privilege to serve God in this life. But it's not just serving God, we also serve one another. It's service before self when we think of the needs of other people.

When we think of the needs of all around us here in our community, whether it's through facing debt or poverty or other needs, whatever they may be, people around us have particular needs.

[8 : 21] That's why you children as well remember that you think of the needs of others before we think of our own needs. It's always service before self.

And that's how it must be for us as Christians in this life. We're not always true to that principle. Sometimes we fail, as we do in many other things.

But it's something we always want to remember and to apply to ourselves. Service before self. So will you remember these three words? Service before self.

Now we're going to say the Lord's Prayer together. Amen.

Well, we are going to sing to God's praise once again, this time Psalm 25 in the Scottish Psalter. This is on page 233, and singing verses 6 to 9. Sorry, that should be 6 to 10. Four verses. No, I'm sorry, I'm looking at the wrong version. It is actually 6 to 9. On page 233, the tune is St. Paul. Thy mercies that most tender are, do thou, O Lord, remember, and lovingkindnesses, for they have been of old forever. Let not the others of my youth nor sins remembered be. In mercy for thy goodness sake, O Lord, remember me. So that's Psalm number 25, page 233, verses 6 to 9. Thy mercies that most tender are.

[10 : 31] Thy mercies that most tender are, do thou, O Lord, remember, and lovingkindnesses, for they have been of old forever.

O Lord, remember, and lovingkindnesses, for they have been of old forever. Let not the others of my youth nor sins remembered be. In mercy for thy goodness sake, O Lord, remember me.

The Lord is good and gracious. He uprightest, O soul. He therefore sinners will instig.

In ways that they should go. In ways that they should go. The meek and knowing he will guide, In judge let just away, To meek and knowing he will guide, To meek and pure, affrighted ones, He'll clearly teach his way.

Now, reading of God's Word today is from John's Gospel in chapter 15. Gospel according to John chapter 15, reading verses 1 to 17. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

[12 : 59] Every branch of mine 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 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. Whoever abides in me and I in him, He it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

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. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, Ask whatever you wish, and it will 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 loved me, so have I loved you.

[14 : 05] 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. This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, That someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, For the servant does not know what his master is doing.

But I have called you friends, For all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, But I chose you and appointed you, That you should go and bear fruit, And that your fruit should abide, So that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you. These things I command you, So that you will love one another. And so on, may the Lord bless to us that portion of His own precious Word.

[15 : 19] Let's again engage in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord. Our gracious God, As we continue in prayer, And praise before you, We do ask for your Holy Spirit to help us, To recollect the many ways in which today we reflect upon your goodness.

Help us, Lord, As we give thanks to you, To realize once again, That the more we increase in thankfulness, The more we will increase in our dependence upon you.

But it is as we bring into our own memory, And as we recollect and think upon, The many good things we receive from you, And give thanks for them. So, Lord, We realize our need to depend upon you, And the truth of your Word, That it is in you we live and move and have our being.

Our very physical frame is dependent upon you. It is indeed, O Lord, True that in our thoughts and in our bodily actions, As well as in those movements of our souls, We are truly dependent upon you.

And especially in the things of redemption, Of salvation, We are dependent upon your grace, Upon the power of your Spirit. Lord, help us indeed to realize, Therefore, as we have been reading in your Word, That cut off from you, And without a living connection with you, We cannot achieve anything, That will be to your praise and glory, Or even to our own good, Or the advantage of our fellow human beings.

[16 : 50] We thank you today, Lord, For the opportunity, That we have to serve you, While we are in this world. We pray that you would enable us to do this, While you keep our faculties, O Lord, So that you give us the mind, And the ability that we require, To be of service to you.

Help us to bear that fruit, O Lord, Through that living connection with you, So that we would bear that fruit of a righteous life, A holy life, A life that will be seen, In all respects, As giving glory to God. This is how you taught your disciples, As we have been reading, O Lord. By this is our Father glorified, That we bear much fruit. We thank you, Lord, For the enabling grace, That you give us from day to day.

And we thank you, That your grace is extended to us, Even at our deepest points of need. And we are especially grateful then, O Lord, For your upholding strength, And for your grace.

O Lord, we pray today for all your people, And we pray for them throughout the world, So many of them in different circumstances, To ours. So many of them, Lord, That find themselves caught up in such difficult, Trying, challenging circumstances in life.

[18 : 10] Lord, we think of our own circumstances at times being challenging, And yet we know that they are far less so, Than so many others in the world in which we live. We pray that you would help us as we pray for them, And give thanks for our own freedom, And for the measure, Lord, That you give us of abundance in our lives.

We pray for those today who are caught up in poverty. So many places in the world, O Lord, Where crops have failed, Where drought and other climatic disaster has reached, In places where there is now scarcity of food.

Lord, we pray for them, And that relief that is brought to them, Might be brought to them quickly, And that they might, Lord, Find themselves at this time provided for, In your great mercy, And in your kindness to them.

We pray that you would bless those today, Lord, Also who are caught up in situations of war. We think again of those in Ukraine, And the surrounding areas that have been affected, By this

invasion.

And Lord, once again, We appeal to you that you would deal with the aggressor, That you would bring these things, Lord, To an end, And in your own way, And as you see fit, We commend the people of Ukraine to you, We commend especially those of your own church, And people there, Who pray to you, Who seek an end to this war, Who seek to return, Lord, Who are in other countries at the moment, And seek to return to their own native country.

[19 : 45] And we ask, Lord, That you would continue to uphold the government in Ukraine, Who battle against so many difficulties, So many things that seem to, Seek to discourage them from day to day, And yet we find, Oh Lord, That they continue to persevere, And we take our own example from them, Lord, In many ways, Of a life that perseveres against adversity, For this is also of the essence of the Christian life.

We ask, Oh Lord, Too, That you'd bless those throughout the world, Who have other difficulties to contend with in these days. We pray for our own nation at this time, And we pray that you'd bless us in times of economic challenges, And other ways, Oh Lord, Where in your providence, We face difficulties as a nation, As a people.

Teach us, Lord, To turn to you, Teach us to pray to you, Teach us to come to depend upon you, Turn us away from our selfishness, Give us, Oh Lord, To come to know you as our God, As our Father in heaven, Bless those who are in government over us, The different parts of the nation, We commend them again to you, We pray for them, Lord, That you would give to them insight, Wisdom, Decisive decisions, Lord, That are taken in the light of your word, Of your truth, Help them to respect your laws, Oh Lord, We ask that, In mercy, You would turn to us, For we have spurned your laws, And we have turned aside to our own wisdom, We have set up the idols of selfishness, Instead of worshiping God, And Lord, We pray that you would turn us, Back into the ways of your truth, Remember us, We pray, In our own locality here as well,

Lord, We ask that you would bless, Those in the Corle, Those in, Those in, In other places of influence, In our community here, And we pray for all, Lord, Who help us from time to time, In our hospitals, In our schools, We pray for our teachers, We pray for those who assist them, We ask that you would bless them, Lord, In challenging times, We pray again for our children, For our younger generation, And we ask that you would grant them, Lord, To be turned into your ways, And where there is rebelliousness, And where there is a spirit of, Of coming to resist and reject authority, Oh, Gracious Lord, We pray that our young people may learn, Of the grace and the authority of Jesus, That they may come to give their lives over to him, And find that he is the best master by far, Lord, We pray that you would grant them your blessing, To those who are engaged today, In missionary activity,

Both locally and throughout the whole world, We pray that you'd bless them, We pray for Muriel, As she spends time with us, And in her travels, Lord, As she speaks about her work, We again commit her to you, And ask your blessing to be with them, With her, And with all who help her in the work in Cambodia, We pray for those who are shortly to go to Gambia, And those who are already there, We ask that you'd grant them, Lord, Your protective care, And their travel, We pray that you'd bless them, And the initiative that they're involved with, And we ask that they may know your blessing, Following them, And making them a blessing, To the people there in the Gambia, We pray today for those who are recovering from illness, Those of our own number, Lord, At this time, We pray for Marianne, We pray for Alan, We ask that you'd bless them, As they recover from treatment, From illness, We pray for all others, Lord, Who are at this time laid aside, We pray for Michelle, And Matthew,

[23 : 37] And their family, We ask that you'd bless Michelle, At this time, Lay your good hand upon her, For her healing, We pray, And grant that your blessing, Will be with them as a family too, And all of their loved ones too, Remember those who mourn in our congregation, And in our neighborhood, Gracious Lord, Bless them, We pray with your comfort, Give them today to know that, They are indeed, Privileged to, Be able to call upon yourself, And help them, As they reflect us, We come towards the end of another year, And, Lord, We know how poignant this is, For those who have lost loved ones, And we pray for them, That your upholding strength, Will be with them, And we ask that in all of these things, As we pray for them, That we may do so, O Lord, Remembering, That we are indeed, Named by the name of God, And so help us, We pray as our God, So that we may go from day to day, Safe, In the knowledge that we are in your hand, Hear us, We pray, And pardon our many sins,

For Jesus' sake, Amen. Well, We'll sing once again, Before we turn to John, Singing this time in Psalm 80, Psalm number 80, Again, And it's in the Scottish altar, And it's page 334, Singing verses 14 to 19.

This is a psalm, That's really a psalm, In many ways of lament, And of prayer, And petition, Where the people in the psalmist's time, Reflect upon, How God took them as a people, From Egypt, Planted them in the land of Canaan, As it were, And he's using the imagery of a vine, Being planted in a vineyard, But instead of bringing forth, The fruit that God sought, They brought forth, Fruit that was just, As you know, In the Old Testament, They brought forth idolatry, They turned away into the ways, Of pagan nations around them, And so God brought, The disaster upon them, That we know of, In the Old Testament, As the exile in Babylon, Here is the psalmist, Appealing to the Lord, To turn them as a people, Back to himself, So from verse 14, We'll sing to the tune, Morvan, O God of hosts, We thee beseech, Return now unto thine, Look down from heaven in love, And behold, And visit this, Thy vine, And so on, Through to the end of the psalm, O God of hosts, We thee beseech, O God of hosts, We thee beseech, We thee beseech, We thee beseech, We thee beseech, And so on, To the end of the psalm, Live thine from heaven, And love me all, And the clap, And this sight is thine of mine, The Bernhard, O God of hosts, Thy own right hand hath planted us upon and the same branch which for I sell thou hast made to be strong. Burned up ages with flame in high they also risk of time.

[27 : 41] They, as army, are perished when as thy face doth rhyme.

O let thy hand be still upon the man of thy right hand, the Son of man, in for thyself thou needest strong to stand.

So henceforth we will not go back nor turn from thee at all.

O dear, thy wickedness and we upon thy name welcome.

Turn us again, Lord God of hosts and upon us thine to make thy cartons to shine and so we shall be saved.

[29 : 47] Now please turn with me to John chapter 15. I'm going to look today briefly at verses 1 to 11. John chapter 15.

We can read a couple of verses from the beginning. I am the true vine. I am the true vine. I am the true vine. This is of course as Jesus is speaking. I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit, he takes away.

And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit. Now we're continuing with our short series of studies called the Portraits of the Church in Scripture.

We've already looked at a number. Last time we looked in Luke chapter 13, you may recall at the fig tree in the vineyard and how we saw that that included some aspects of the life that we find in the church and how God has placed us deliberately under the gospel that we may flourish for Him.

And that's continuing in chapter 15 here of John, where Jesus, as He addresses the disciples, says of Himself, I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser.

[31 : 04] It relates to some of the pictures you have in the Old Testament, descriptions of the church, of the people of God, the covenant people of Israel, as they're described as a vineyard or sometimes as a vine.

What you find in Isaiah chapter 5, for example, also references in Ezekiel as we sang Psalm 80. You find that imagery used in Psalm 80 as well of the people as a vine that God had planted in the land of Canaan.

But here we find Jesus speaking of Himself as the true vine, the vine which is going to bear fruit through its branches, through those people who are connected to Him spiritually in such a way that they bear spiritual fruit.

And that's really one of the great lessons of the passage, the nature of our connection with Jesus and what that connection needs to be if we are to bear fruit for Him, if we are to bear fruit spiritually to God's glory.

So, that's the first point I want to really try and emphasize from the passage, and that is that there is here described a living connection to Jesus, a living connection to Jesus Christ.

[32 : 23] Secondly, we'll look at more fully a fruitful connection to Jesus, because the whole purpose of a vine is to bear fruit.

And one of the things Jesus says, as we'll see, is branches of the vine that do not bear fruit are cut away from the vine. They're cut off from the vine. They're then dumped. They're rejected.

And there's a spiritual lesson solemnly in that as well. So, here's first of all a living connection with Jesus. Now, obviously, it's fairly obvious that the vine and the branches, the main trunk of the vine and the branches that develop from it, are vitally connected together.

And I mean vitally in the proper sense of the word, vitally meaning bringing life. The branch cannot live except as it draws its life-giving sap from the trunk of the vine, just like any plant, like any tree. If the branch is cut off for whatever reason or broken off for any reason, then obviously the sap doesn't reach through to that branch, and it begins to wither, and eventually it will die.

[33 : 33] And that's applied here to the life of God's people. Indeed, you could say that this extends to, in its principle, to every human life because God has created us to bear spiritual fruit that will glorify His name.

God has created us as human beings as He placed us before we fell in Adam, before we sinned against God and brought upon ourselves the death that we now are so familiar with, spiritual as well as physical, the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of a perfectly holy life, was what God created.

And that's what God has purposed and intends and designed us as human beings to be, to be fruit bearers, to bear that fruit of righteousness, of a life that is pleasing to God.

Now, of course, that connection to God was broken off in Adam, and we all fell in Adam, and so we're not connected vitally to God until we are reconnected through coming to Christ, through what the Bible itself calls a repentance or turning from sin, from the ways of sin, from the ways of self, or turning from that or coming to accept Jesus or coming to close in, if you like, with the offer that God is setting out for us in the Gospel, where He's saying to us, here is life, here is a reconnection with me, here is my Son, here is Jesus, the Son of God in our nature, and He is, as the mediator, the provision that God has made for us to be reconnected with Himself.

So, as you come to accept Him, as you come to trust in Him, as you come to turn from sin and receive Him, and seek to live a life following Him, that really establishes by that faith and trust, and, of course, behind it the regeneration of God by His Spirit.

[35 : 36] That's where we have a reconnection with life, a vital connection, a living connection to Jesus Himself. So, that first point for us is so incredibly important today.

We have to look at ourselves, every one of us here, myself included, and ask ourselves, what is the nature of my connection with Jesus? Is my connection with Jesus just the connection I have through the Gospel or through worship in the church?

Is my connection with Jesus just one of knowing about Him, of hearing about Him, of being familiar with the Gospel? Or is my connection with Jesus much more than that?

Are the roots of my life rooted in Jesus Himself? That's the vital question, isn't it? Thomas Boston has, in one of his writings, he has a wonderful illustration.

It's one I think I've used before. Let me just remind you of what he says. He says, if you look at a vine climbing up a tree, the vine is clinging closely to that tree.

[36 : 45] It's using that tree for its support, but it continues to grow on its own root. It doesn't take any of the sap from the tree.

It continues to grow on its own root. Its roots are otherwise than in the tree itself, you might say. And he says that's how some people are under the Gospel too.

They have a certain relationship with Jesus in the Gospel. They know about Him. They join together in worship of this God, of this Christ. They know much about Him through the Gospel, through the teaching of the Bible.

But he says they continue to grow on their own root. They have not left their own root as sinners, as lost human beings, and come to be rooted in Christ instead.

That's essentially what you and I need to be rooted in Christ. Leaving the root in which we are born into this world, the root of our connection, if you like, to Adam and his fallenness and our sinfulness and our lostness.

[37 : 58] And in coming to receive Jesus, and in coming to trust in Him as our Savior, so we come to be grafted onto Him, if you like. We come to have our roots, the roots of our very human being, rooted in Him, vitally connected to Him.

And that's like the tree, like the vine and the branches. Following the imagery of Thomas Boston there, let's ask ourselves the question today.

Am I ensuring that Jesus is my hope, or is He just a prop for my own hopes?

Am I ensuring that Jesus is my hope, that He Himself is my hope of eternal life, that my life is so joined to Him that because He lives, I shall live also?

Or am I just using Him in a formal way, if you like, so that my own hopes, my own human hopes, my own hoping for the best, will somehow come to be fulfilled?

[39 : 08] Well, today, that's what the Lord is setting out for us, the need for a living connection with Jesus. And the benefits of a living connection with Christ, for a life-giving fruit to His glory, bearing fruit.

That's the second point, a fruitful connection to Jesus. Now, you notice what He's saying here?

Verse 4 Verse 4 The first point is the first point in bearing fruit, in having this fruitful connection to Jesus.

We need to just not just be in Jesus, but what He says here is to abide in Jesus. Of course, there's a sense in which once you're in Jesus, you're never out of Jesus. Once you're connected to Jesus for spiritual life, you never lose that connection.

But what He's saying is you've got to look after it. You've got to make sure that it's a true connection. You've got to make sure that it's a connection that will indeed keep bearing fruit. Some vine branches, of course, get knocked off.

Maybe some animals can break them off, or maybe it'll be the wind and a gale that'll break them off, or whatever. Sometimes branches in the vine get knocked off. And, of course, once they're broken, once that connection is broken, they don't continue to bear fruit anymore.

[41 : 05] And then some branches may even turn out, even if they are connected to the vine in some way or other, something or other causes that they don't bear fruit. In any case, Jesus is using that illustration to say that for a fruitful connection to Jesus, you must abide in Him.

You must continue to live in connection with Him in a way by which His strength, His grace, His life flows into your own so that you continue to bear fruit.

Because He says every branch that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And then later on in the chapter, the branches that don't bear fruit, they are gathered together, verse 6.

And the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. And I don't think it's wrong for us to see the language of divine judgment in these words.

Because that's what you find described elsewhere in the Bible, elsewhere in the New Testament. Matthew chapter 3, verse 12, Revelation chapter 20. The judgment of God speaks about eternal fire.

[42 : 16] It speaks about, well, what we call the fire of hell. And solemn though that is, we don't want to hear about that ourselves. Of course, it's difficult teaching. It's difficult to accept.

It's difficult just to put that to yourself. But it's there. It's God's truth. That if we're not vitally connected to Jesus with a fruit-bearing connection, with a life-giving connection, this is going to be our destiny.

Like the branches of the vine, they'll be gathered together. And they'll be rejected. And that's such a solemn point even as we look at this great passage.

And Jesus Himself spoke more about that than anybody else. There's more about hell and the teachings of Jesus than anywhere else in the New Testament, in any other New Testament writer. There's Jesus' teaching very squarely. So, abide in me and I in you. So, there's the need to abide in Him. But how do you abide in Jesus?

[43 : 23] What is involved in abiding in Jesus and Jesus abiding in us? Abide in me and I in you. Abide in me as the vine and you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. So, how do we abide in Jesus? How do we ensure that our connection with Jesus continues to be one from which we receive the life that is in Him into our lives to bear fruit for Him?

Well, first of all, by abiding in His love. Notice verse 7 here. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask, you can ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

And He goes on to speak as verse 9, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. And this love relationship that Jesus has with His people is something that He requires us to abide in.

Abide in the provisions of it. Remain within what He provides for us through His love. And as you come to know Him and to love Him and to know His love for you, what He is saying is, in that precious relationship, in that relationship that bears fruit as connected vitally to Him, as you

continue to bear fruit, through keeping Christ's Word and also keeping yourself in His love, making sure that it's His loving provision that you continue to prize and to cherish and to live by.

[44 : 59] Something similar in chapter 14, actually, 14 and verse 21 there, where you find about Christ's commandments. He says, whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.

And he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him. And then there's this question put to him by Judas, not Judas Iscariot, where Jesus answered, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.

And then there's the wonderful interconnections between loving Jesus, keeping Jesus' Word, keeping His commandments, abiding in His love, abiding in Him.

It's all one wonderful complex relationship. When you keep the Word of Jesus, when you are obedient to Jesus, when you love Him to the extent that your life is controlled by Him, then you can say you're abiding in His love and His loving provision.

And all of these things as they interact and as they inter-work remind us of what he means by abiding in Him, abiding in Christ's love.

[46 : 17] And there's the template for you in verse 10 where he says here about himself, as I keep my Father's commandment, so if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

Fruitful connection with Jesus through abiding in Him and abiding in His love. But it's a fruitful connection too through the Father's pruning process.

See, every branch in me says that bears fruit, he prunes it. Or the word is really cleansed, the Lord's translated here prunes. The old translation has cleanses.

Every branch that bears fruit, he cleanses, he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit. And that's God's dealing with us as we are connected to Christ.

That connection to Christ, that fruit-bearing connection to Jesus, doesn't put us outside afflictions, doesn't put us outside having to bear certain challenges and sufferings for Him.

[47 : 27] Far from it. It actually draws, in a way, some sufferings to us that we wouldn't have otherwise, because they're for His sake. It's because we're related to Him, because people see Him in us and through us.

And so, the challenges and the opposition that he faced, in principle, in the same kind of way from human beings, that we experience as we follow Him, as we seek to remain true to Him and abide in Him, and bear fruit that the world will see as Christian fruit, as the fruit of righteousness and a holy life.

Well, the word clean, I think, is important. Already, he says, every branch that bears fruit, he cleanses or he prunes. It's not just a matter of pruning.

The person who looks after a vine has to make sure that there aren't too many leaves. If there are too many leaves left on it, it will actually overshadow some of the fruit, and it won't ripen in the same way or to the same extent.

So, some of the leaves have to be cut away, and so that the fruit itself is more exposed to the right conditions. But then, of course, once the fruit is done, once the fruit-bearing season is over, the branches that have carried that fruit and produced that fruit need to be cut back.

[48 : 48] And that's all with a view to next year's growth. You see, this is such an important, such a wonderful relevance of this portrait that Jesus is painting for us here, where he's taking what you find in a vine and saying, this is true spiritually.

The branches that are attached to me that are fruit-bearing branches are actually branches that, in order to bring forth more fruit, with a view to future growth, in other words, they have to be cut back. They have to be pruned back. Sometimes, you know, if you see an expert vine dresser, as it's put here, the person who keeps, looks after the vineyard, when you look at that person actually coming to prune the vines, taking his cutting shears, his secateurs, and cutting back the branches, you'll say, wow, that's a bit severe.

Surely he should have left a bit more growth than that. But he knows what he's doing. He knows that if he cuts it back in a certain way, even if it appears to be rather severe to people who don't know anything about vines, such as myself, then he says, no, no, this is necessary.

I've got next year's growth in mind. I know what I'm doing. If I don't cut it back this way, it will not produce that same amount of fruit that I need next year. Now, that's a spiritual point that Jesus is

making for us.

[50 : 10] Our lives need pruned. God has to actually deal with the excesses of our lives.

And he does that sometimes, indeed very often, in a way that hurts us, in a way that causes pain, in a way that we ourselves would not have chosen.

Weas by, in his providence, events that come into our lives are very challenging and very difficult, such as the loss of loved ones, bereavement, illness, events in his providence that, whatever they are, cause us pain, sometimes very deep pain.

And we may wonder at the time, even as Christians, even as those who know ourselves connected to Jesus with a vital, fruitful connection, we might be very much saying to ourselves, well, why does it have to be this painful?

Why does it have to be pruned back this far? Why does it need to be to this extent?

[51 : 17] Why does God cut into my life so keenly as he does? Why has he done this? It's to produce more fruit.

I know that's very difficult when you're actually in the situation at the moment, at the moment of God's pruning.

It's very often the case. You cannot really see how this is going to be profitable. You can't see how this is going to produce more fruit. It seems to be doing the opposite.

How can actually such pain, such loss, such deprivation, such sorrow, how can it work towards anything good? Well, there's a verse in the letter to the Hebrews which talks about chastisement, talks about a similar kind of thing, God's pruning, if you like, of his people, you find that this is how he describes it, that the cutting away of certain aspects of the growth of our lives is necessary in God's way of the future producing or production of more fruit.

It is for, he says, your discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

[52 : 52] Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them.

But he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.

But later, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. God is training his vine.

God is training the branches of every vine that he has planted. Maybe today you are one of those vines that have known the severity of his cutting more than most.

But here is the purpose of God. But here is the purpose of God. And it is always important to look to the purpose of God.

[53 : 58] What is he doing? What is it about? What is his intention? What is the end in view? That it may bear the peaceable fruit of righteousness to all those who have been trained thereby.

Every branch in me that bears fruit, he prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. And friend, keep that in mind.

And let me keep it in mind with you. As we know of the difficult providences of God, we know we're going to have them during this life. But sometimes when they come, they're much more difficult than we anticipated.

As C.S. Lewis said over the death of his wife, I did not realize it would be this painful. Sometimes God says, yes, it will be that painful.

But this is my purpose. This is the end I have in view. That you will bear more fruit to my glory. Difficult though it is.

[55 : 07] There is God's purpose. And remember, God's purpose for his people is always a loving purpose. There's never a purpose just to cause pain for the sake of it.

It's the loving purpose of bringing you onwards to bear more fruit. And he says that your fruit may abide. Look at verse 16 here.

We're just going a bit ahead of the passage, but verse 16. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide.

See how it all comes together. This abiding in Jesus, abiding in his love, abiding in his word, so that we will produce fruit for him, but so that we'll produce more fruit for him.

And he says, this, he says, is why I chose you. This is why I appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide. Your fruit has to abide, has to remain.

[56 : 10] Now, that's interesting because that's essentially the language of mission. See the word go there. I have chosen you, and I have appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit.

Not just that you should bear fruit, that you should go and bear fruit. In other words, the mission of the church, the mission of God's people, the way in which we witness to the gospel, the way in which we present the gospel, our evangelistic activities are part of our fruit bearing.

It's an aspect of fruit bearing where our fruit is going to abide. How is our fruit going to abide?

Because as God blesses that evangelism, as God blesses that outreach of God's church, of his people, as the vine by God's planting bears fruit and goes, as he puts it here, as his disciples to others with the gospel, well, they come to be vines themselves.

They come to be planted in Christ. They come to bear fruit. And so, our fruit remains. It keeps on going down the generations. Why are there people in this church today?

Why are there people here worshiping God? It's because people before you prayed for you and passed on their witness to you. And you saw their fruit. Most of you saw them. Most of you realized that they had something which you didn't have yourself.

[57 : 30] So, you came to Christ and you're now a fruit bearer. And you're going to pass on that fruit to those who are coming after you. That's why we teach our children. Because God has chosen his people so that they would be joined to Christ and bear fruit.

And their fruit will remain. And as their fruit remains, so the church from generation to generation continues to serve God in this world.

And there's one other point I want to make before we finish. We have a fruitful connection to Jesus by abiding in Jesus, by abiding in his love, and through the Father's pruning for a fruit which abides. And what's the other point? It's to provide us with a fullness of joy. These things, verse 11, I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

I think that means that Christ's own joy in the salvation of his people meets up with their joy in him.

[58 : 40] So that his joy and their joy, as it were, combine together. That my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. You know, I'd like to take an atheist to this verse and say, Do you now believe that the Christian life is a dull life?

Do you believe the Christian life is one of despondency and gloom and grayness? Because here's a verse that tells us to be obedient to Jesus doesn't fill your life with dullness, it fills it with joy.

This, he says, is why the Father prunes us, that we may bear more fruit. This is why I'm connected to Jesus, you can say, so that I bear fruit to his glory.

Because in all of that, it is my greatest joy to know him. It's my greatest joy to serve him. It's my greatest joy to be in him and for him to be in me.

And anybody who tells you that the Christian life is otherwise, take them to John 15, verse 11, and tell them, That's what I know in my own experience.

[59 : 54] That I receive the joy that I need, that I was created for, through knowing Jesus for myself. Through having this living, vital, fruit-bearing connection to him.

Friends, we were created to enjoy God. That was God's purpose in creating us in the very beginning.

The first catechism of the shorter catechism, which many of us, if not all of us, learned in our younger days, has the question, what is the chief end of man? In other words, why was man created?

What's the purpose of human life? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Take both parts with you.

Don't leave it at the first part. Because as you glorify God, so you know of true and lasting joy. Yes, that joy sometimes will fluctuate.

[60 : 57] Sometimes it will be interrupted by the Father's secateurs cutting into your life.

But it's a joy that will never end. It's a joy that nobody can take from you. It's a joy that those who are in Christ truly say they know.

As we were created to enjoy God, so today enjoy this God.

Make it your business to have that living connection, that fruit-bearing connection to Christ. That you may fulfill and I may fulfill the end, the purpose for which God created us, and for which God reconnected us to Christ.

So that we as fruit-bearing branches connected to the vine may know that fullness of joy that only Jesus and knowing Jesus can bring.

[62 : 06] Let's pray. Our gracious God, we thank you for the way that you have appointed your people to be so vitally connected to yourself, through your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you today for the nature of that connection. We pray, Lord, for grace to ensure that we each of us have that living connection with you. And even when we find, Lord, that our complaint is our fruit as we see it is so small and so puny and so insufficient and so different to what it should be.

Nevertheless, Lord, help us to rejoice if we know that we are connected with you and seek more fruit for our lives. We pray that you would help us to do so. We ask that your blessing will be with us now throughout this day.

And pardon our many sins, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we're singing in conclusion in Psalm number 92. Psalm 92 in the St. Sam's version of it.

So it's 92a at verse 8. And the last few verses there to the end of the Psalm to the tune, Contemplation. But Lord, you are forevermore exalted very high.

[63 : 25] All evildoers will be crushed. Your foes will surely die. You made me strong as any ox with oil anointed me. I've seen my enemies defeat and I have heard them flee like palm trees and like palms and cedars flourishing.

The righteous all will be and planted in the house of God will grow abundantly. These verses to the end of the Psalm to God's praise. The Lord, you are forevermore exalted very high.

The Lord, you are forevermore exalted very high.

All evil to earth will be crushed. Your foes will surely die.

You made me strong as any ox with oil anointed me.

[64 : 44] I've seen my enemies defeat and die, have heard them flee.

Like palms and cedars flourishing, the righteous all will be.

And planted in the hearts of God will grow abundantly.

So when old age they still percute, they will stay bright and strong.

They will proclaim, the Lord is just my Lord who does no wrong.

[66 : 12] I'll go to the main door again today after the benediction. And now may grace and mercy and peace from God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us this day and evermore.

Amen. Amen.