

The Importance Of Bearing Fruit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 August 2019

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 15. John chapter 15 and verse 2.

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.

As we know, this chapter, John chapter 15, is part of Jesus' great teaching and instruction prior to his death.

We have so many of these great chapters. In fact, some Christians have learnt by heart, some, not the whole lot, but some have learnt by heart.

They've set out to learn by heart a lot of these verses because it's so rich in teaching and instruction. So we so often go back to these chapters and these verses.

[1 : 10] And in this chapter, Jesus is instructing his disciples in three vital relationships. The disciples of Christ are to be rightly related to Jesus.

They are to be rightly related to one another. And they are to be rightly related to the world. That's in this teaching. There are these three areas, three aspects.

And so the disciples of Jesus have three particular duties. A duty to abide in Christ. A duty to love one another.

And a duty to witness and testify to the world. These are the sort of the three things that come out from this. And Jesus here is giving the last of the great I am statements.

We know that in his life he gave these statements like, I am the door and I am the good shepherd. And here, this is the last of them where Jesus says, I am the true vine.

[2 : 14] And the vine in many ways was the supreme symbol in Israel. There was like a golden vine trailed above the porch, the entrance to the porch of the temple.

And so often there were indications or allusions to the vine right throughout the Bible. I believe, I think history will show us that when there was a revolt in 68 to 70 AD, before the Romans completely destroyed Jerusalem, there was this Jewish revolt.

And that they sort of, when they minted their own coins, on that coin there was the inscription of the vine, because it was the great symbol of Israel.

And we find, as we say, allusions to this all the way through. For instance, Psalm 80 very much highlights of how Israel was the vine that was taken out of Egypt.

But sadly, as time went on, that vine ended up being burnt up, because the vine lost its way. And you see, this is what the Lord had.

[3 : 26] His great purpose in Israel was that it was to be through Israel who were given the word, given the law, that it was through Israel. That was a great promise that was given to Abraham, that through him and his seed, that all the nations of the world would be blessed.

And Israel were to keep their own identity by seeking to establish the worship of God and remain true to that worship.

And it was through that way that the word was to be spread throughout the world. But as we, if you follow through biblical history, so often, rather than being a light to the nations round about, they began to embrace the ways, the practices, the customs, of all the nations round about, and they took on board their worship as well.

And of course, this was an offense to the Lord, because they embraced the idolatry and the practices, so that rather than being a blessing to other nations, they discovered that the other nations had become like a curse to them.

And so this is why, like for instance, in Psalm 80, it talks about the vine being burnt up. But then again in Psalm 80, it goes on to say, and speaking of the Lord Jesus, that this is what it says, the Son of Man you have raised up for yourself.

[4 : 51] This was to be the true vine, that God was going to bring a true vine, and through this vine, then that all the branches would be fed and through be nourished.

And so Jesus is here saying, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Now the vine, of course, we know, just in the same way as a tree, the vine is what gives strength and nourishment to all the branches and to all the clusters of grapes.

And unless the vine is able to nourish, unless there is the feeding coming through, then there won't be fruit on it.

And Jesus is holding himself up as the one, and he says, listen, it is only in and through me that you will be given the grace, the strength, the help.

It is only through me that you will truly be able to bear fruit to the glory of God. In and of yourself, you can't do it.

[5 : 54] It's only in and through me. And that's how Jesus is describing himself. And that's why Jesus is using the expression so often of abiding in him, that abide in me and I in you as a branch.

That's what he says in verse 4, as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. If a branch is cut off and it's lying on the ground, that branch will eventually just wither and die away.

The source of its life has been taken away. And Jesus is saying the same. If you are not abiding in me, if you're not united to me, then you will not bear fruit.

It's as simple as that. And then he says, I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser. The one who is over it all is the father.

It's the father who has appointed Jesus as a vine. And the father is the one who is attending to us all. He's the one who is over it all.

[7 : 03] We've always got to remember that, that God is a specific interest in every single one of us. Even today, we don't take any movement or do anything without his knowledge.

And he is the one who cares for us, the one who's looking after us. And he is the one who will seek to feed us in and through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what the Lord says here is often, as his teaching is often, solemn, it's often challenging.

He says, 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.

So the Lord is saying here, there are some branches. In other words, there are some people within the church and we use that in the broadest possible sense.

When we talk of the church, we don't, we're not talking about us just here. And even if we were to talk just of us here, within the church, what we term the church in its broadest sense, there will be people who will say that they're Christians, but the fact is that they're not bearing fruit.

[8 : 19] And at the end of the day, it's the Lord alone who's over all that. The Lord alone really knows. You and I don't. We don't even know ourselves properly. And that's why we're told not to judge.

Scripture's very strong in that because we're very prone to judge one another and make assessments of one another and to work out who this person is and that person. And we have a, we kind of think we know.

We don't. And often, you know how often we've said over the course of our life, you know this, I got all, I got that all wrong. And that's why the Lord says, don't judge other people.

You don't know. There's only one who can judge a right and that's the Lord because he knows exactly. He knows his own. He knows who are truly his. So not everybody who might say, well, I'm a Christian is really a Christian.

And the Lord himself is the one who knows. And that's what he says, those, every branch of mine that doesn't bear fruit. This is the key that we have to ask ourselves.

[9 : 21] Are we bearing fruit? Now, he says then that he's going to take them away. Now, that might, people may say, well, that's very harsh teaching.

Are you saying that within the Christian church there are people who maintain they're Christians but they're not and the Lord's going to take them away? Well, that's actually what he says. It's not me that's making that up.

This is what he says. And you may say to yourself, well, how can you how can you base that? Well, take for instance, the Lord in the parable of the sower shows that the good seed is sown.

And there are different responses. Remember the first, there was the first where the seed fell and the birds of the air came and plucked up the seed. And Jesus shows that that's what happens.

Satan so often takes away the seed before it can get into our hearts. But then there was seed that fell on shallow ground. And the ground was, there was only a wee bit of soil and then it was all rock underneath.

[10 : 26] And the seed went down and it seemed to spring up for a little. But then it it weathered away because there was no root in it. It didn't take root and so it perished.

It died. And he was saying there are some people that it seems for a little while that they're beginning to follow the Lord. and maybe might appear that, oh, there's, there's, yeah, I'm a Christian.

But then after a wee while they fall away, they disappear. They've stopped. And there's others, he said in the parable, in the, like in, stay in the sower that it's sown amongst weeds and the weeds strangle and choke.

But then there's others that fall on the good ground and it springs up and it brings forth fruit to thirty to sixty and a hundredfold. And so Jesus is saying this is how it's going to be in the church.

Again, you look at biblical history at the very beginning. The first two born into this world, Cain and Abel, both of them sacrificed to the Lord.

[11 : 23] God accepted the sacrifice of one. He accepted Abel's sacrifice. But he didn't accept Cain's because Cain came a different way. Cain chose to come his own way.

It's very obvious from the very beginning that God had set out the way of coming was by sacrifice through blood. The Bible tells us without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

That's why Jesus shed his blood for us. And in the Old Testament it was always pointed to what Jesus would eventually do by the shedding of blood. Abel came the correct way.

Abel came by blood. He took the sheep of the lamb, offered us a sacrifice. Cain, who was keener on the gardening, he took some of the produce of the garden and he sacrificed it.

The Lord didn't accept it. We know the outcome of what happened there. But it's just showing how from the very beginning. You look at when Israel wanted a king.

[12 : 35] And the first king that God appointed for them was Saul. And to begin with, Saul seemed a good king.

But we know then that there was another king appointed and that was David. So the first two kings that were appointed and appointed by God. The first king, Saul, remember, both of them sacrificed to the Lord.

Both Saul and David sacrificed. But we're told that David was a man after God's own heart. But that God rejected Saul.

Saul turned away from the Lord. And he went on a downward spiral so that in the end we find that Saul actually, he's consulting mediums and a witch.

He's gone so far away. And we're told he's rejected. People will say, was Saul lost? Well, we're not told specifically in the scripture although it doesn't look good for Saul because of this downward spiral.

[13 : 41] People say, well, he must have been lost if the Lord rejected. But some people will say, well, the Lord rejected him with regard to his kingship. But maybe didn't reject him as a person.

But then others will say, well, he must have because his end was, it was just, it was a downward spiral going further and further and further away. And then people will say, well, what about, surely then in the New Testament it'll be different when we come to Jesus.

Well, you think Jesus appointed, he chose 12, 12 specific disciples. You look in there coming to the end of Jesus' life and you see them gathered together in this room.

And you look along and there's John and he's leaning against the disciple whom Jesus loved and he's leaning against Jesus. It's very intimate. And then you look a wee bit further along. There's another disciple there.

That's Judas. Judas. And both John and Judas followed Jesus for the three years. Judas would have had a great testimony. Judas went out doing great things.

[14 : 48] Judas went out preaching along with the others. They went out in twos. They went out teaching and preaching and healing and all sort of things. And yet Judas was planning while he was sitting there of betraying Jesus.

Judas. And the other disciples didn't know because when Jesus said one of you is going to betray me they all began to say is it me? And nobody automatically said well that'll be Judas.

It's pretty obvious who that is because Judas seemed the same as them. They never for one moment suspected. But Jesus knew because Jesus had said that Judas had a devil in him.

Jesus knew the heart of Judas. And we know and scripture is much more specific with regard to Judas than of Saul that Judas was lost.

So it's so I just find that so searching so solemn that you can be so close so much part of the church and yet not be abiding in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 55] not bearing fruit. So Jesus Jesus' teachings although they're often so warm so lovely they're often so challenging and hard hitting.

So Jesus then tells us what's going to happen that the Lord is going to take away. There's two things happen. One when the Lord comes to look for fruit if there is no fruit and there won't be any fruit there can't be fruit if the branch is not in the vine.

If it is severed if it's not in the vine now again the Bible will tell us very clearly that a person cannot be in Christ one day and out of Christ another.

It's important you know this is one of the great wonderful truths of the Bible that you can't be saved and lost irrespective of what you may do if you are if you are truly a Christian if you are truly in Jesus Christ if Jesus Christ has died for you if you are in a union with Jesus Christ irrespective of what you may do you cannot be lost.

The Bible shows us that and again that's one of the things that God's word does show us is that some of God's people they did awful things and David that great man who wrote the most wonderful lyrics that any songwriter has ever written that have just gone right deep into the heart of every person I mean what David did it really is quite extraordinary because when he went into this adulterous relationship with Bathsheba to cover his tracks to kill to have murdered one of his most loyal because that man Uriah was a man that was just utterly loyal to David he was a friend to David and yet he had him killed and so I mean we might say to whatever I've done I never did what David did but the point is that and David of course repented incredibly over his sin

[18:17] Psalm 51 and other Psalms will tell us that but the point is that once we are united to Jesus Christ we are safe but the point is this that there are people who aren't united to Christ who are in the church and that is why the Bible always says examine yourselves whether you would be in the faith it's important it's important that we examine ourselves so when the Lord comes looking for fruit and there is none because we're not united to him then we're told that he will take it he'll take that branch away and we sometimes ask how does the Lord show this well it happens through different ways you know sometimes there are people who begin to follow the Lord and they start out following the Lord and you know it's a lot easier to follow the Lord when everything is going well a lot easier to be a Christian when everything is going well and your life is running smoothly and you almost feel the smile of providence on you and it's a good day and you're feeling well and everything is going well yeah it's fine there was a day when it was popular to say

Hosanna after Jesus and you're and you're and you're and you're and you're and you're and you're and you're and you're and your world your personal world goes upside down and every day seems to be difficult it's a struggle and you say you look around and other people are getting on and you look at all those people they never darken the door of church they're not interested in God and they're not interested they're getting on fine and you say to yourself what why that's like in psalm 73 the psalmist is saying I've done I've been following the Lord it's all in vain this is often the great separation that takes place those who truly belong to the Lord they will they hang on in the difficulty they'll hang they cling on sometimes they feel they're barely clinging on but they're like Peter they say to whom else can we go because you got the words of eternal life

Lord I have the first idea of what you're doing to me right now Lord it doesn't seem fair I just feel broken and empty and sometimes you can feel anger in your heart you can feel all kinds of things you feel bitter you say what's the point and yet you can't go back you keep following on you keep following why because he won't let you go that's why but there are others and they'll go back and they'll say oh that's it John Bunyan makes that beautiful illustration of this very thing remember when when Christian left the city of destruction and two people went out after him obstinate and pliable and they were trying to get him to come back and he was telling them of all the beauties or the wonder of the celestial city to where he was going obstinate I'm not going to listen to any more of this and he went back but pliable thought this is good I want to hear more of this

I'm coming along with you and on they went and he was Christian was telling pliable more and more about what was happening and going to happen and then all of a sudden they fell into this huge bog into the slough of despond and remember how Bunyan describes it Christian worked his way through it but pliable he just went back he pulled himself out and he said if that's what it's about I'm out of this and he went back to the city of destruction and that's a picture exactly of what happens with so many people that's what happened in the time of Jesus so many were following him crowds following him but when his teaching became difficult we read about it in John chapter 6 they began to take objection they began to be offended by what he was saying and huge crowds began to desert him to the point where Jesus turns to the twelve and he said are you also going to go away and that's what Peter said to whom else can we go because you are the words of eternal life but it's an awful thing what we see here because it says in verse 6 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 what so many people don't realize is that God made us for himself for his glory that is the chief purpose of our existence and God is looking at every single life and he's saying is there fruit to my glory is this person living for me if not no matter what you might do in this world at the end of the day

God is saying no it's got to be fruit to my glory and so this is a sad and the solemn thing but then it tells us this that when the Lord comes looking for fruit and he finds a fruit what does he do he prunes in other words he begins to cut you know when you when you prune a when you start in the garden and maybe you're going to do a bit of pruning you get out you get out the the the the pruning you clip away and if you were if you were a a brand a wee bush that's alive you'd be oh no no but in a sense if we if we look at it at a spiritual point of view that's what the Lord is doing and it's funny you know sometimes people when they're pruning they really cut away and you think to yourself oh what on earth have you done to that and people who people who really know what they're doing it's amazing how sometimes they cut things back then when you come later in the next year you say whoa what growth there because it was important in order to get more fruit and more growth there has to be a cutting back and that's exactly what the Lord is doing with you and with me as well and there have been days along the way and you've been you giving out the owls and the yelps and so on but the Lord is saying I have to do this because I want more fruit from your life now of course we're not all going to bear the same level of fruit

[25 : 11] Jesus said that some will be thirty fold some people are content with a little love and a little joy and a little grace but the great thing is this as long as there is fruit Spurgeon used to say a little fruit will bring us to heaven but a lot of fruit will bring heaven to us and there's a lot of truth in that thankfully the Lord doesn't say when he comes and he finds only a little fruit that he takes it away no he doesn't it's only when there is no fruit that he takes away but it does if there's a little fruit and you notice there's a progression goes on because it says first of all that bears fruit and then it goes on to say bears more fruit and then it bears much fruit so that there's this ongoing growth it's becoming greater and greater so this is God's great purpose for us and

I suppose you have to ask yourself what is the evidence that you're bearing fruit well I would say the most basic thing is that you have a love to and for the Lord do you have that today and I'll add this that you have a love to and for the Lord but you lament you mourn you're sad at how little love you have to and for the Lord and your desire it's one of the greatest desires in your heart is that you want more love you're saying if only I could love the Lord more and you come sometimes you'll come to church and you'll think that every other person in the church loves the Lord far more than you do and you want to really love the Lord let me tell you nobody can think like that unless the Lord is in their heart you cannot it's impossible it's only a Christian that will have the desire to love the Lord more and more because you say Lord and the and you your sense of indwelling sin the sense of your failure all these things and and the fact that you grieve the Lord you know so often you say oh Lord forgive me now I know that

I would say that 99.9% of the population when they do wrong there might be some people that there's the odd person and you come across people like that who seem to be void of any sense of feeling or conscience or any awareness of right or wrong and these people are they're obviously I would say a threat to society but 99.9% of people have that might will have a sense of wrongdoing and be aware and that everybody at some time will or other all people have a sense of remorse and a sense of guilt even although for some people it might be some people might be really hard and might not have much but everybody has but the Christian it's not just a sense of when you go wrong it's a sense of your wrongdoing against God and you say oh lord I can't believe the kind of person

I am please please lord forgive me forgive me my sin lord I've let you down again and there's all this so all these are indicators of our love of the lord our problem with ourselves our self self is such a problem and we become weary have you ever become weary of yourself you say I'm tired I'm tired of myself because you it's not that you hate yourself but you're weary of your failure of not being who you want to be so often and you're saying lord because you why are you weary of yourself because you want to be more like the lord and you feel just that it's not so and so the lord says he's going to prune us and he because he wants more fruit and as we said this pruning can be can be difficult and so the lord is going to going to prune us and the times he's most likely to come and prune us is when yes he finds fruit but he says I want more fruit and the lord knows he can read our hearts he knows what we're like and he says I know what's needed here if he sees pride within our heart he says well this man this woman needs to be humbled a bit because we're always needing to be humbled or if he sees us becoming too settled in the world and sometimes we become comfortable in the world not saying of course we live in the world we work in the world we interact in the world we're in the world and we make the most of what we've got here and we should and we should be focused on the lord and be committed in our lives but if the lord sees us beginning to lose the focus on himself and becoming more and more comfortable just where we are in the world and losing the spiritual vitality and the world's becoming more attractive to us and we're going to settle down and take our ease and lord's saying

I'm going to shake it up a wee bit I'm going to just move things around a wee bit here and it doesn't take long until we realise oh no I've lost and we're then again looking to the lord and seeking from him and so the lord is pruning us more and more all the time and so it's important that we learn to live in this way and it should be our prayer lord help me to be a fruit bearing christian and the bible is very clear on what that fruit is good galatians chapter 5 and we're told there in the bearing of fruit there should be love joy peace long suffering gentleness goodness faith meekness temperance that's what should characterise our life that's what a christian is a person who is living in this way where there is and as they deal in all the different situations in life there is love and there is joy and there is peace and there's gentleness and that's a witness that affects the world some christians say in order to witness for christ we have to become absolutely identical to the world well that's no witness it's where we bring a different attitude and a different spirit not trying to be different but just seeking that jesus will shine in us and through us and that the fruit of the spirit will be that that's what operating in life and in our work in our home in all the different places and situations that we find ourselves in and so let us examine ourselves because it's vital to see are we branches that are abiding in him abiding abiding is a it's one of john's favorite words it's one of the great words of scripture abiding in christ the holy spirit comes to abide within us when we leave this world we go to abide in glory forever abide is you're always there you don't leave it and that's a wonder when jesus christ comes through the spirit into our heart into our life he comes to abide to stay to take up residence forever when we leave this world if we are in jesus we go to abide in his presence live with him forever is that how we are today is that how you are today abiding in jesus may we seek then so that as the psalmist says that in old age when others fade they fruit still forth shall bring you know it's lovely to see an old fruit bearing christian it's lovely to see old christians who are maturing and you say to yourself you know there's there's something lovely about that person and even sometimes when the age is taking away so much that they have or that they had in life yet there is still this sense of there that you can see the lord in them it's a wonderful thing and we should be praying for that in old age when others fade that we still bear fruit to his name let us pray lord our god we pray that we might be fruit bearing christians that we might be rooted in you have mercy upon us lord for when we let you down and fail you but we give thanks for your patience with us and for your goodness and grace towards us we pray that you will take us to our homes to on wherever we're going that you will be with us and that you'll bless us not only throughout this day but that your goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and that all of us will dwell in your house forever take away from us our sin in jesus name amen