

I Am a Branch of Christ

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Date: 10 March 2019

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[0 : 00] Open your Bibles. We'll have two scripture passages that we'll read from today. Starting in Isaiah 5.

! I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard.! My loved one has a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines.

He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?

When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed.

[1 : 19] I will break down its wall and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated. And briars and thorns will grow there.

I will command the clouds not to rain on it. The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.

He looked for justice, but he saw bloodshed for righteousness, but he heard cries of distress. And then turn over to John chapter 15, where this illustration of the vineyard continues.

John 15, and we'll read verses 1 through 9. The words of Jesus. I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

[2 : 34] It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. Let's listen as God's word is preached.

I am the vine, and you are the branches. I wonder if you have any trees that drop branches, especially after windy nights like last night.

[3 : 44] When I was away for vacation and came back, it looked like somebody, a tree trimmer had come and done his work and left the mess for me to pick up.

And then I learned that you had had some wind while I was gone. If you're the one that mows the yard at your house, you know what it is like to pick up branches.

And it's my aim this morning that after today's sermon, you will never be able to pick up branches again without remembering your identity in Christ, as seen here in John chapter 15.

You want to have your Bibles open to it. It's on the night of Jesus' betrayal. Judas is already gone to get the temple guards.

And the Lord Jesus says to his 11 disciples, I am the vine, you are the branches. That's an identity statement. You are the branches.

[4 : 48] So if you're a true disciple of Jesus, then you can say with me, I'm a branch in the true vine. Let's confess that together. I am a branch in the true vine.

Now, if we're going to appreciate our identity as branches, we must know something of the vine that we're united to. So here in John 15, we learn right away that the vine is the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's one and only eternal Son made flesh. This child of the Virgin Mary can honestly say, I am the true vine.

It's one of the great I am statements that Jesus makes in the in the Gospels of in the Gospel of John. Ego eimi. I am the way, the truth and the life.

I am the resurrection and the life. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. I am the light of the world. And here I am the true vine.

[5 : 56] Now, the picture that John 15 is drawing for us is not branches from a mighty oak tree or a maple such as might grow in your yard.

But these are branches of a great vine. It was the most common plant throughout Palestine. And by saying, I am the true vine, he seems to be contrasting himself with a false vine.

And that's what we found in Isaiah chapter five and the passage that was read where we found that the Lord's vine or his vineyard was Israel, the sons of Jacob.

And Psalm 80 and verse eight, as well as other passages, Psalm 88 and verse eight says, you brought, speaking of God, you brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it.

What we found in Isaiah five and these other passages in the Old Testament is that Israel was not a true vine. That it did not bring forth good fruit to the glory of God.

[6 : 57] They had every advantage that they could have wished for. The greatest of advantages from God over all the other nations. They had the very words of God.

They had the law and the gospel and the promises, the temple worship, the presence of God dwelling in the cloud among them.

All of these privileges. If ever there was a people who should have produced good fruit in their lives to God's glory, it was this vine, this vineyard of Israel. But God complains that when I looked for good grapes, it yielded only bad.

I looked for justice and I found bloodshed. I looked for righteousness and I heard the cries of distress from those who you are oppressing. And that's the whole history of the Old Testament.

It's a record of Israel's failure to bear fruit to God's glory and honor. So that vineyard of Israel came under the deserved curse of God, which we read.

[8 : 03] And so here now in John 15, 700 years after Isaiah, stands the Lord Jesus and he says, I am the true vine.

I'm the true vine. Israel proved to be a false vine. Here is the true vine, the real vine, the genuine, dependable vine of which the other was a sad type.

Here's the vine that produced nothing but good fruit to the glory and praise of God. In all of his trials, he always did what pleased the Father. In all of his temptations, though he was tried in every point like we are, it was without sin.

Nothing but good fruit came from this true vine. And what a fruitful vine this Jesus is. He's full of life and vitality.

Indeed, the whole vineyard now consists of just one vine. And yet its branches reach into all parts of the world. And every single branch is attached to this one vine.

[9 : 15] So that's the true vine, Jesus Christ, God's son. Now the branches. Who are the branches? Well, the branches are Jesus saved people. As we said, Jesus is speaking to his disciples.

Minus Judas, the false disciple. When he says in verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. You, my disciples, you who believe on me.

You who have taken me at my word and put your faith in me for salvation. You who have received my teachings and obey them. You who are repenting and turning away from your own way to walk in my way and to follow me.

Building your lives upon me as your rock and your foundation for life. You, you are the branches.

So if you this morning are Jesus' disciple. Well, this is your identity. If you're joined to him in that living, saving union through faith in him.

[10 : 24] You are a branch in this true vine. So Jesus' branches, we learn in this text, are all fruit-bearing branches.

It's really quite an amazing phenomenon that all of Jesus' true branches bear fruit. And that's simply because all of Jesus' branches are connected to him.

They are united, joined to him. And so that even dead branches on the ground can be grafted into this vine.

And he is so fruitful and so full of life and spiritual vitality that in union with him, even these branches will spring to life and bear good fruit.

And you and I are the evidence of that. Who are his disciples? We're fruit-bearing branches. We were dead in sin.

[11 : 22] We've been made alive in Christ. And we now bear fruit to his praise. In fact, this fruit-bearing of his branches is so consistently true that fruit is called the proof that we are Jesus' disciples.

Again, our Lord Jesus, by their fruit, you will know them. Verse 8, in this way, we show ourselves to be his disciples. Fruit is the proof of that vital saving union with Christ, the fruitful vine.

So that being joined to him, we branches now partake of that spiritual life of Christ coursing through our veins. The spiritual sap of his grace, or as one writer has put it, the life of God in the soul of man.

It flows from the vine to us, the branches. And with such spiritual sap from the vine, we cannot but bear fruit. Now it's true, there are those who are false disciples, who are branches only in name, whose connection with Christ and his people is only outward and formal.

And yet there they are. They're found right alongside of the true branches. They may be baptized. They may be members of good churches. They may be professing to be Christ's disciples, even busy doing many things in his name.

[12 : 56] But they have no real saving faith. And therefore, no real attachment to Christ the vine. No vital connection. So none of his divine life is flowing into them.

Sanctifying, cleansing, and saving them. And so they bear no fruit of holiness. Think of Judas.

Indeed, he's the one absent here. And this is big on this night. This is the night of his betrayal. There he was, outwardly close to Jesus, found right alongside of all the other branches, wasn't he?

He was the trusted treasure among the eleven. They all said, he can be trusted with the money. Let Judas do it. He preached. He cast out demons.

In Jesus' name, no less. And yet all of this without any real saving faith. No vital connection to Christ. And so he's without any real good fruits in the eyes of God.

[14 : 01] So his betrayal of Jesus on this night shows his true character. And his true works as they now become evident.

No, these fruitless branches are not people who were saved and then lost their salvation. There is no such thing in Scripture. Rather, like Judas, they never were saved.

Even though they profess to belong to Christ and align themselves with Christ and his people. Well, here on this earth. But verse 2 tells us quite clearly, Therefore the Father cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.

And verse 6 says that such branches are thrown away and wither. They're picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. And folks, that's just another clear reference that Jesus makes to hell and eternal punishments for those who are not savingly joined to him by faith.

They will not stand in the judgment. And fruit bearing is the one sure evidence of true branches who are savingly attached to Jesus, the true vine.

[15 : 11] So we've seen the vine is Jesus. The branches are his true disciples. And now thirdly, what is this fruit that Jesus is talking about?

Just exactly what is this fruit that all branches that are truly joined to Jesus produce in their lives? Well, it's described in many ways in the Bible.

But in short, this fruit is a transformed life. It's a transformed heart and life supernaturally empowered by Jesus Christ.

Now, what does this life look like? Well, it looks a lot like Christ. And that makes sense, doesn't it? Since Christ is full of grace and truth, and from his fullness have all you his branches received grace upon grace, wouldn't it make sense that our lives start to take on the likeness of his life?

We partake of the very sap of grace, the very divine life of Christ. It flows from the vine to us, the branches. So what we see in Christ, we would expect to see and to find in the branches, his branches.

[16 : 27] It's a Christ-like life. That's what the fruit is. It's characterized by the spiritual graces and virtues that are found in Christ, his thoughts, his words, his affections, his will, his moral actions, his character.

It's a Christ-like life. It's also described as a righteous life. A righteous life is a life of keeping God's righteous laws, his right commandments.

That's the fruit that is born by these branches. So Paul can speak in Philippians 1.11 and pray that the Philippians might be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

The fruit of righteousness. The fruit which is a righteous life. In Matthew 7.21, Jesus speaks of this fruit that marks his disciples as a life of doing the will of the Father.

They are doers of his word. Colossians 1.10 describes this fruit as a life of good works. Paul prays for the Colossians.

[17 : 34] They might be filled. They might bear fruit in every good work. Bearing fruit in good works. It's described as holiness. It's the fruit that's produced in all who are connected to Christ by saving life. It's his life formed in us.

So that Paul says in Galatians 4.19 of those Galatian believers, my dear children, for whom I'm again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

That's the fruit. It's Christ being formed in his branches. And that fruit is of being joined to Christ is supremely a life of love.

Live a life of love just as Christ loved us. Ephesians 5 and verse 1. Galatians 5 speaks of the fruit of the spirit. And number one on the list is what?

[18 : 35] Fruit of the spirit is love. Love. Love. And indeed, love is the summary of the whole law, isn't it? It's what Jesus says. All the law and the prophets.

The whole Old Testament can be summed up, he says, in two commands. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.

What is the fruit of being attached to Jesus? It looks like love. And we're studying that in the afternoons. We'll hear another segment this afternoon from 1 Corinthians 13.

What this love looks like. It looks like what Jesus showed to his God and to his fellow man. That's the essence of holiness. That's the good fruit produced by union with Christ.

A life of love to God and man. So saving faith connects us to the fruitful vine. And because of that connection, his divine supernatural life flows like sap from him into all the branches, producing the good fruit of a Christlike life.

[19 : 45] His love. His joy. His peace. His patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. And self-control.

That's the fruit we bear as his branches. And now we've come to the main point of the passage. And it's signaled as the main point in at least a couple ways.

One is it's located at the very center and heart of our text. It's verses 4 and 5. Where he says, Remain in me. Talking to his branches now.

The vine speaking to his branches. Remain in me. And I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. What do branches?

[20 : 43] We who have this identity of branches. What do we need to learn from our identity as a branch?

Well, this is the heart of it. That all of our fruitfulness. All of our fruit bearing flows from Jesus Christ. The true vine. And from him alone.

Evidently, we need to hear this. He tells it to us four times here in these two verses. He tells it twice negatively. Twice positively. And that's the other mark. That this is the key point of the passage.

It's repetition. This is the way Jesus takes a highlighter through. Verses four and five. He repeats the same thing over and over. Don't miss this. This is the all-important lesson for you branches.

Our utter, absolute dependence upon Christ for bearing fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. So we're back in the yard picking up branches.

[21 : 42] And there's that branch at your feet. And it's dead. That's why it fell. And what's the likelihood of that branch?

Budding and bearing fruit of acorns. Some other kind of fruit. Well, it's zero. It's zero. That's what Jesus says. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

There it is. By itself. Remember that when you're picking up branches. It cannot bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine.

What's the likelihood of you, branch? Producing the good fruit of a Christ-like life apart from Christ? Zero.

You might as well expect to see that branch on the ground bear fruit as you bear fruit apart from me, Jesus says.

[22 : 39] Apart from me, you can do nothing. Nothing pleasing to God. Nothing acceptable to Him. Not a little.

You can squeak by. No thing. Not one fruit of righteousness. Not one Christ-like virtue pleasing to the Father.

And we need this truth drummed in us. Lest we go leaning on our own understanding. Leaning on our own strength. Head into the day without prayer. Without asking God for help.

As if we had life by the tail. We can live this Christian life without Christ. No, this is to remind us. You can't live the Christian life without Christ.

You can't bear any fruit without the vine and attachment to Him. And yet, such moralism is far too common within Christendom today. People just trying to be good.

[23 : 39] Trying to be like Jesus. What would Jesus do? And without being attached savingly to Jesus, they're just trying to be like Jesus. And it's an exercise of failure.

You can't. You can't do anything without saving union with Jesus Christ. So Jesus commands us to remain in Him. This is our responsibility.

If Jesus commands us to do something, we have a responsibility here. To maintain this union. To commune with Jesus Christ. Because only by remaining vitally connected to the vine can we bear fruit.

And what an important message for these eleven disciples to hear this very night. As one of them, Judas, will no longer remain with them.

Will separate himself from Christ. Will walk away. And so, showing that he was never spiritually joined to Christ by saving faith.

[24 : 41] But this soon coming arrest. That's just minutes away. And then the trial. And then the crucifixion. And then the death. And burial of Jesus Christ. That will be a tremendous trial to the faith of these eleven disciples.

They're all going to forsake him and flee. Peter three times is going to say, I don't even know who he is. Satan is going to try to shake them up to the point where they'll deny the faith once and for all.

And yet after their own imperfection. And their own unbelief. And their own unfaithfulness. They will have these words.

The last words of Jesus ringing in their ears. Remain in me, man. You must remain in me. You must stick with me. You must abide in me.

And me in you. Because without me, there's no life. Apart from me, there's no fruit bearing. The Bible teaches this critical lesson in so many other places.

[25 : 48] I've referred to Philippians 1.11. Being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. You see it again. It comes through Jesus. That's the only way that the fruit of righteousness is produced.

Hosea 14.8. God says to his people who had strayed from him. Your fruitfulness comes from me. You're turning to this idol. You're turning to that nation. You're going everywhere to try to get help.

Israel, just stop. Stop going there. Return to me because your fruitfulness comes from me. I'm like a green pine tree. I'm always green.

I'm always productive. And you'll find fruitfulness only in me. Apart from me, you can do nothing. But now, brothers and sisters, listen.

The positive truth of the matter is that we are not apart from Christ. He says, apart from me, you can do nothing. We're not apart from Christ. We're not like that branch on the ground that is detached from the vine.

[26 : 51] No, God has put us into Jesus Christ. We are attached to him. And therefore, we are able to bear fruit.

For the precious life-giving sap from the true vine flows to me. That's your identity. Realize it. Live like it. Be you have been made one with him and united to such a fruitful vine.

You can bear fruit to the glory of God. You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. All that he commands you to do and all that he calls you to endure, you can do through the supply of grace that flows from the vine to you, the branch, and works so powerfully in you.

So all that you need as a branch is there in the vine, Jesus Christ. What do you need, branch?

You say, I need more patience. I'm being called to wait. To wait on God. Well, you'll find that in Jesus.

[28 : 00] The vine. He had to wait. Is it more love? Is it more joy? Is it more peace? See what you need, branch, first in the vine.

See it in Jesus Christ. Look at that wonderful patience of Christ. And then draw it from him by prayer. By believing prayer. Act faith on that Savior, that vine, Jesus.

And say, Lord Jesus, I need your patience. Make me patient like you. We see it first in the vine and we draw it from him in prayer.

It's there in the vine for you, dear branch. Did you know that? That grace is in Jesus for you. He's full of grace for you that you might go on receiving from him grace upon grace upon grace.

His grace is sufficient for you. So take it. Take it by faith. Receive it by believing prayer. So that's the fruit.

[29 : 06] It's only found as we're attached to the vine. The vine is Jesus. The branches are Jesus. People connected to him. The fruit is a Christ-like heart and life.

Only possible through him. There's one more important factor in the fruit-bearing process of Jesus' branches. And it's the gardener. It's the gardener. And the gardener is Jesus' heavenly father.

Verse 1. I'm the true vine. And my father is the gardener. Now, I don't know of two more encouraging truths for branches than these.

Number one, Jesus is the fruitful vine that we are attached to. And number two, his father, who is now our father, is the gardener.

He's the vine dresser. The one who cares for us branches. Who's in charge of our spiritual health and well-being so that we will produce fruit. Now, there's a lot that needs to be done to get a branch to bear much fruit.

[30 : 10] And he, the heavenly father, is the one doing that. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1.30, It's because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.

There's the God-centeredness of the gospel. Are you attached to Jesus as a branch? It's because of him that you are in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1.30.

He has grafted you into his fruitful vine. But now that you are attached to Christ, it's not like his work is done. Not at all. There's much more to be done to see you bearing fruit.

Much more fruit. And here the focus is upon the work of pruning. An important part of the fruit-bearing process of branches. Verse 2, the latter part, says, Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

And over the years, I've found that getting trees or vines to produce good fruit is a lot harder than it may appear. Those pictures in the seed catalog that tell you if you buy this plant, this is what it will look like three years from now?

[31 : 21] Well, it's a lie. Or at least it's not the full truth. It's highly unlikely. In fact, unless you know what you're doing as the gardener, I guarantee you, it won't look like that.

No, the gardener has an important part to play in the fruitfulness of the vine. There are diseases from fungus. There are scald from the sun.

There's frost damage from the cold. There's insect damage. There's any number of things that can and do go wrong to keep the plant from bearing good fruit. So what does the gardener do to make the fruit-bearing branches even more fruitful?

Well, he prunes them. He prunes the branches. Now, it's the same word for cleanses them. And that same word is translated prunes in verse 2 and cleanses in verse 3.

But it's the same word. And you can see why they're closely aligned. The pruning is the metaphorical picture. But the cleansing is what's being done.

[32 : 25] That tree has got diseased parts in it. And that branch has parts that need to be cut out, cleansed, pruned, so that it will be healthy and whole again.

And so the gardener is out to prune his branches to make them even more fruitful. Pruning is a delicate matter.

Pruning is a delicate matter. You better know what you're doing. If you don't prune enough, then the overgrowth of foliage will hinder and replace the development of the valuable fruit.

And you'll be eating nothing but leaves. But if you prune too much, you might have just cut off next year's harvest of fruit. Which is what I did for some years.

And if I was one of my early apple trees, I would have feared the sight of John coming at me with his loppers. I didn't know what I was doing. And yet I was pruning.

[33 : 27] And I did harm to the tree. Dear branches in the vine of Jesus, the one who is pruning you to make you more fruitful, it's none other than your heavenly Father.

The one who gave up his one and only son to save you. Rather than see you suffer in hell forever, he put his own son through suffering.

He punished him instead of you. So great was his love for you. So you can rest. Rest when you see him coming with the pruning shears.

He loves me. He has perfect knowledge, perfect wisdom. He knows exactly what to cut away. And he loves me so much that he won't cut anything away other than what is absolutely necessary to fulfill his purpose of greater fruit bearing to his glory.

What a precious truth for the branches. Pruning is painful. What a pillow to lay your head on at night to know that the one doing the pruning is your loving Father who gave up his Son so great, his love for you.

[34 : 49] And so branches have diseased and damaged parts that need to be pruned away. And so our Heavenly Father comes and he sees things in our hearts, in our lives, that if left uncared for, they would negatively affect our fruit bearing and could even destroy our spiritual lives.

So our Heavenly Father is actively involved in pruning us. Now, how? How does he prune us? Let me just mention two ways. First, God's Word. Jesus says in verse 3, You are already clean.

You're already pruned because of the Word I have spoken to you. So when these men first followed Jesus, they were diamonds in the rough, weren't they? Plenty of dirt and corrosion and disease upon them.

But for three years, he's been pruning them, cleansing them through his Word. That's what we see. He's constantly teaching them, whether walking by the way or gathered around him.

He's teaching them the Word of God and it's cleaning them. It's pruning them. Just minutes later, Jesus would be praying to his Heavenly Father, the gardener now, and he'll say to him, I'm going to leave now, Father, so you sanctify them through the truth.

[36 : 06] Your Word is truth. And so it's as if he's saying, I've been pruning them. Now you, you sanctify them through the Word. And so his truth comes to us and it corrects the lies that we're believing as Christians.

It sets us free from all kinds of snares of sin. It purifies us from our uncleanness. God's Word, pruning off diseased parts of our hearts and lives.

Pruning is not a one and done matter. So you've been out pruning real early, late, late winter. Don't throw your pruning shears away.

You're going to need them again and again and again. As long as that plant's alive on earth, you're going to need those pruning shears. And these men, who were initially cleansed by the Gospel Word, heard and believed, still had much more pruning and cleansing to do by the Father.

So this is one of the things that happens to us when God's Word comes in contact with us. Whether through reading it yourself, hearing it read in the worship, hearing it preached, having a brother or sister share a verse with you.

[37 : 21] This is one of the things that's happening. God is pruning. He's pruning. He's cleansing us. He's putting his finger on things. You know what I'm talking about.

You're reading. And God puts his finger upon something and says, that's got to go. Branch. That doesn't line up with my Word.

With Jesus Christ. That's got to be cut out. Or it will damage your fruit bearing and may even kill you.

He's pruning us. Pruning us with his Word. It can be painful, but it's oh so necessary for our spiritual well-being.

And it's not only the diseased and damaged parts of the branch that need pruning off. No, it's also those suckers that grow up on the branches. It's just that useless growth.

[38 : 19] It'll never bear fruit. It just sucks away the sap into these suckers. That's why they're called that. And pulls it away from fruit bearing.

These are things in our lives that are not in and of themselves sinful. But nonetheless, hindrances to fruit bearing. And they grow so subtly and unnoticed by us.

And then God, through His Word, says, there's one, John. That's a sucker. Cut it off. He's pruning us. He's pruning us. Therefore, since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and sin that so easily entangles.

Those are two different things. There's this plain out and out evil. And then there's the things that hinder us. In and of themselves, maybe not evil. But if they're hindering our fruit bearing, they become sinful and must be pruned.

So I don't have time for greater fruitfulness, but I do have time for this thing in my life. That's grown so far that it's sapping my heart for Jesus. And sapping my greater fruitfulness for God's glory.

[39 : 39] So I'm having my devotions, reading God's word, and I begin to see clearly that something in my life has grown to the place where it's hindering. It's hindering greater fruitfulness in my life.

It's sapping time and attention. And the heavenly gardener is putting his pruning shears to it.

He wants to make me more fruitful, you see. And he also prunes not only by his word, but by sanctifying providences in the second place. We don't have time to go into this.

That can be all kinds of things. God brings someone into your life to help you grow. Bring something into your life. Prunes us with trials and afflictions.

He's after more fruit, you see. So David says, before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. Now there's greater fruitfulness in my life. Why? Because God afflicted me.

[40 : 41] He came with his pruning shears. Hezekiah can say, surely that illness, surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. It did something to me.

It changed me. And through it, God changed me and made me more fruitful. Maybe his painful pruning was to simply draw you closer to the true vine.

That you might bear more fruit. Hebrews 12, he disciplines us that we might share in his holiness, you see. He's after more fruit, more likeness to Christ.

Romans 8, 28 and 29. In all things, he's working together for our good to those who love him and are the called according to his purpose. Amen. And what is his purpose? Verse 29.

He's predestined us to be conformed to the image of his son. And so, he prunes something in our lives because he wants us to get closer to Jesus.

[41 : 42] That we, beholding him, might become more and more like him. being transformed from one stage of glory to another into his likeness. A sculptor was asked how he turns a hunk of marble into a horse that looks so realistic.

He says, it's easy. I just chisel off everything that doesn't look like a horse. And that's what the gardener's doing with his pruning shears. He's cutting off everything that doesn't look like Jesus.

He's cutting at us to get us to look more like him. That's the good fruit he's after. In heart, in life, not just outwardly, but in character.

That's why he prunes. So that we will be even more fruitful. Verse 2. I wonder. I wonder because I know that I wonder if we're clear on that point.

I wonder because I can see how long I can live without that being clear in my mind. It's an important part of our identity as branches.

[42 : 53] Branches exist in the vine to bear fruit to the glory of God. It's why I'm a branch in this vine. It's why the gardener even has a vineyard.

That he might receive the harvest of fruit and glory to him. It's why he even chose us. Verse 15. Why he chose us to be his branches that we might go and bear fruit.

Fruit that will last. It's why the gardener has connected us to Christ. It's to bear fruit. It's why he's pruning us. He's seeking more fruit.

He's after more holiness, more love, more obedience, more faith, greater likeness to Jesus. I wonder if the gardener's great purpose for us as branches has sunk in to where we get it.

We exist to bear fruit to his praise. That's what he's after. That's what he's doing. You see, if we're not clear on that, that that's his great priority, then you'll ever be confused by the gardener.

[44 : 10] You'll ever be walking under a cloud of absolute disillusionment. What is going on? Why this? Why that? And may even get upset at the gardener for what he's doing with his shears.

If you ever think that ease and present happiness is the Heavenly Father's number one aim for you, you're going to be disappointed. Maybe even be like Asaph and grow bitter against God.

But here's such a clarifying truth that once realized and kept front and center with us is so freeing to realize the purpose of the gardener.

Oh, I see it now. He's after more fruit. He wants me more like Jesus. Then I'm in a mindset most willing to cooperate with the gardener and his pruning and what he's after more ready to reap its great result and to bear even more fruit.

And why does the gardener want more fruit from us branches? Well, Jesus tells us, verse 8, this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit.

[45 : 24] It's to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit. Oh, this, this is the chief end of the gardener. is the one thing for which he does everything that he does for his own glory.

This is the chief end of the branches as well. It's why we exist, why we're saved, why we're branches in the vine, that by bearing more fruit we might bring glory to our skillful gardener.

We might bring glory to our fruitful vine. What a vine to produce such fruit on a branch like this. What a, what a gardener with pruning skills to get so much fruit on that branch.

And so branches, they can take no, no glory for their greater fruitfulness. Wow, look at all that fruit hanging on me. Why not? Well, apart from me you can do nothing.

And, and that just stops all boasting of fruitfulness in us, doesn't it? It's, and so we're taught at least two things by that. We're, we're taught where to seek grace and power to bear more fruit.

[46 : 36] It's not in me. I've got to look outside of myself to the vine. I need the every hour. I need you today. If I'm to be a husband, a wife, a son, a daughter, a parent, a churchman, a worker, an employer, a student, a teacher, if I'm to bring you glory today, oh, I need you because apart from you I can do nothing.

No glory brought to you. It teaches us where to seek this grace and power outside of ourselves but it also teaches us where to give all the praise. I can't boast if I've been begging as somebody who knows apart from him I can do nothing.

Therefore, if I do anything that's true fruit bearing and true glorifying to the Father, then sole deo gloria to God alone be the glory.

And so we ought to go through our day asking for help. I'm a branch. I'm like that thing on the ground. I can't do anything. And so I come, God, Lord Jesus, you are a fruitful vine.

Give me grace today to bear fruit for you and to glorify the Father. and then he helps us so we pause right then.

[47 : 54] Thank you. You are to be praised for helping me. And then we ask for the next event and then we pause and so we make our way through the day dependent upon that vine and then praising our heavenly gardener and our fruitful vine for what they have done.

we see how Jesus the vine seeks the glory of his Father. He'll go to a cross to glorify his Father. He'll be damned in order to glorify his Father should we, his branches, not seek his glory as well.

Well, so may you never be able to pick up branches again from your yard without hearing them preach to you about your identity, that you're a branch connected to divine Jesus in order to bear much fruit to his glory and praise.

May you see in that branch your dependence. Ah, that's me without Jesus. That's me without Jesus. Apart from him I can do nothing. And may you see your purpose as a branch.

Why am I a branch? Not on the ground but attached to Jesus. It is to bear fruit, more fruit to his praise and honor. Well, when is a branch not needing the vine?

[49 : 15] Sing with me. I need thee every hour. Every hour I need thee. Oh, bless me now my Savior. It's number 710. And I want you to sing it as I'm going to sing it as a branch to your fruitful vine.

Stand with me. 710. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, it's because of you that we are in Christ Jesus. Thank you for putting us into such a fruitful vine. The fullness of the deity dwells in him.

And we're complete in him. We have all that we need. He's full of grace for us. So pour out of his fullness into our emptiness and our neediness and produce more fruit, more like Jesus, that you might be praised and honored through us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.