

## The Vine And The Branches.

Text: John 15:1-8

Suggested Hymns:

170, 472, 519, 835, 337

1) A close union

2) A fruitful union

3) Severance of the Union Leads to  
Untold Misery

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 15:1-8, <sup>1</sup> *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*

<sup>5</sup> *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The parable of our text was spoken by Jesus on the night of His betrayal. It is a portion of the farewell address spoken by Jesus to His disciples before entering upon the path that led Him from Gethsemane to Gabbatha, to Calvary.

In obedience to the will of His heavenly Father He was about to enter upon the final stage of the great plan of God for man’s salvation. The saddening events of the days before Him were not hidden from the eyes of the omniscient Lord, and He knew full well that it would be a severe shock for His beloved disciples to see their Lord and Master in His deepest humiliation.

They would be offended in Him, and there was the great danger that they would be tempted to turn their backs on Him. Therefore it was necessary that He should impress upon their minds the necessity of clinging closely to Him and abiding in Him. He does this, among other things, by means of the parable before us.

The admonition given by Jesus to His disciples is intended also for us, and we, too, are in constant need of it. Let us consider the union of Christ and believers. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Let Us Realise That It Is A Close Union**

The union of Christ and His believers is pictured to us by our Lord in the beautiful Parable of the Vine and the Branches. As always Jesus shows Himself here as the Master Teacher. By means of this engaging parable He impresses on our minds how closely His disciples are united with Him and how utterly dependent they are upon Him for everything.

Jesus says, *I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.* When God in Isaiah 5 speaks of the vineyard which He had planted and of which He expected to harvest grapes but found that it brought forth only wild grapes, He calls Himself the Lord of Hosts and identifies Himself not only as the Vinedresser, but also as the Owner of the vineyard.

Thus the Father in heaven is not only the Vinedresser who is in charge of the vine that was planted, but He also owns the vineyard into which He has planted the vine. Since the Father in heaven is the Owner and the Vinedresser who did the planting, it follows that the Vine which He planted must be the true Vine.

In the opening chapter of his Gospel St. John refers to the manner in which the Father planted this Vine when he tells us, *“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”* The Father in heaven was moved to plant this Vine, to send His own dear Son into the world, because He loved the world. His love for a loveless and lost sinner world was so great that He was willing to give the dearest and best that He had, His own dear Son.

The one purpose for which this true Vine was planted by the heavenly Father was the redemption of the world of sinners. This is why Jesus left the glories of heaven and came upon this earth. This is why He was made flesh and assumed

our human nature. By His holy life and His innocent suffering and death Jesus redeemed man, gained for him perfect righteousness and eternal life.

The religion and worship of God's people in the Old Testament abounded in symbols. These symbols were descriptive of, and pointed to, God's Son, who would come into the world. The Old Testament symbols were taken from nature and included the pearl, the rock, the stone, the lion, the lamb, the stars, the sun, the rose, the lily, and many others.

But none of these symbols give us a picture of the close union that exists between Christ and the believers so well as our text, in which Jesus refers to Himself as the true Vine.

Believing Christians are the branches on this Vine, planted by the heavenly Father. Through the new birth by the water and the Spirit they have been brought to faith, and they have thus been grafted into the Vine.

In their natural condition they, like all people, were dead in trespasses and sins. There wasn't even a spark of spiritual life in them. Neither could they have brought themselves to life. The heavenly Vinedresser by His Holy Spirit took these dead branches, grafted them into the living Vine, and gave them spiritual life.

The union between Christ and His own is the closest and most intimate union possible. All that they have and all that they are, the Christians owe to their Lord. Their spiritual life stems from Him. It flows into them as branches attached to the living Vine. Without Him they would be spiritually dead.

How instructive is this Parable of the Vine and the Branches! And how well it impresses upon the Christian's mind his utter dependence on his Lord! It leaves the child of God with nothing of which to boast except of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, which found him and sustains his spiritual life. It tells him to be on his guard continually lest the enemies of his soul, the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh, succeed in severing the close union between him and his Saviour.

Are you a branch of this Vine? Are you growing and thriving spiritually? It is certain that God planted the true Vine for the benefit of all people. He sent His dear Son into the world for the salvation of all, none excepted. It is God's

earnest purpose and will that all people be united to Christ by a lively faith. Do you belong to those who are His, or are you still a dead branch?

Has the Law of God brought you to a knowledge and conviction of sin, and has the sweet Gospel of God's redeeming love led you into the arms of the Saviour, whom God sent into the world? It dare not be a matter of unconcern to you whether or not you are attached as a spiritual branch to Jesus, the true Vine. Joy, happiness, contentment, forgiveness of sins, free access to the Father, a clear title to the mansions above, all this and more is involved here. Attached to Christ as the true Vine, you possess all the spiritual blessings for this life and for eternity.

There are indeed many who are detached from the true Vine and yet have the idea that they are attached to it. Were they not baptised in early infancy? Did not their forefathers plant the church in their community? Do they not make occasional use of the church and support it spasmodically with their earthly goods?

Such outward and rather haphazard attachment to the institution called the church many mistake for a real attachment to Jesus. However, only a true living faith in Jesus brings about this attachment of the living branches to the true Vine, and this close union will soon manifest itself as a most fruitful one.

## **2. A Fruitful Union**

As branches on the Vine the Christians bring forth much fruit. Christ, the true Vine, gives His branches sap and strength so that they produce fruit. Only if by faith man stands in closest communion with Christ, is he enabled to bring forth the true fruits of the Spirit of which St. Paul speaks in Galatians 5, *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control.*

Faith will manifest itself in a new, God-pleasing life. Speaking of faith, Luther calls it a *"divine work in us, which transforms us and makes us altogether different men in heart, affection, mind, and all powers."* The Reformer adds, *"Oh, it is a living, energetic, active, mighty thing, this faith! It cannot but do good unceasingly. Where there is faith, one does not ask whether good works are to be done; but before the question is asked, the works have been done, and there is a continuous doing of them."*

He adds the statement, *“It is impossible to separate works from faith, just as impossible as it is to separate the power to burn from fire.”* The closer a Christian in faith clings to his Saviour, the richer he will become in good works. Jesus says in our text, *“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”*

The heavenly Vinedresser prunes the branches of the Vine, that they bear more fruit. *“Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”* It is true, as Jesus says, that His Christians are clean through the Word which He has spoken to them. In Christ they have the forgiveness of their sins. But sin still clings to them.

This calls for a pruning process. By means of crosses and trials Christians are again led into God’s Word that they might learn even better to renounce and shun sin, and more and more to bring forth fruits of righteousness.

Do the trials and troubles that come into your life seem only evil to you? Do they appear to you simply as annoying burdens which must be borne, evils to which you must submit because you have no control over them? Are they a heavy load that you would shake off if the choice rested with you? Or do you, as a child of your heavenly Father, at times think that you ought to be spared these unpleasant experiences?

Know for a certainty that such crosses have not come into your life by chance! They have been sent to you by your loving Father in heaven. They are a part of the pruning process of the heavenly Vinedresser, designed to lead you even deeper into God’s Word and thus to closer communion with the true Vine.

Christians, furthermore, have free access to the Father. Jesus promises, *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”* Through Christ, the true Vine, also the branches are acceptable to God. For Christ’s sake God is well pleased with the Christians. They can at all times step before God and pray to Him with all confidence, and they have the promise that their prayers are acceptable and heard by God.

Who has not had the feeling at times that he prays and nothing happens? We pray and become more incessant in our supplications, and heaven appears to be closed to our petitions. Was it perhaps a case of trying to dictate to God the time and the manner in which we expected Him to answer our prayer, or did God in

His own way answer our prayer while we, blinded by our grief, failed to observe His helping hand?

Let there be no mistake about it that as God's dear child you have the grand privilege to bring all your wants before your heavenly Father and that all true prayers are heard by Him.

God is honoured and glorified by the good works which Christians perform. The more closely the Christians are united with Christ by faith, the more will they honour and praise God by their good works also before the world.

A branch withers away and loses its fruit-bearing power the moment it is severed or cut from the vine. If no real fruits are evident in your life, if God is not honoured and glorified by your works and deeds, is it because you have become detached from Christ?

A true Christian will let his light so shine before others that they may see his good works and glorify his Father who is in heaven. Do not fail to make daily use of God's Word. Permit each Lord's Day to direct your footsteps to His house, and come with an open and eager heart to hear His holy Word. Be a regular guest at the Table of your Lord, eating and drinking Christ's body and blood for the strengthening of your faith. When you do this your life will abound more and more in good works, and you will show forth the praises of God who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Do you abound in fruits of faith? If you are grafted to the true Vine, it will become apparent in your life. It cannot be otherwise. Someone has listed the following fruits of Christianity: *"In the home it is kindness, in business it is honesty, in society it is courtesy, in work it is fairness, toward the unfortunate it is pity, toward the weak it is help, toward the wicked it is resistance, toward the strong it is trust, toward the penitent it is forgiveness, toward the fortunate it is congratulations, and toward God it is faith, reverence, and love."*

As you go about your daily life and duty, may it become quite apparent to everyone that you are one of those branches attached to the true Vine.

There are many dry branches in this world, still unattached to Christ, bearing no fruit and failing to glorify God. A Christian is concerned about these, and he cannot rest until he has done all in his power to make of these dead branches true, living, fruit-bearing branches of the true Vine.

A real concern about the salvation of immortal souls, and a translation of this concern into action, is one of the many fruits brought forth in the lives of Christians by which God is glorified and souls lost in sin are brought to salvation.

### 3. Severance of the Union Leads to Untold Misery

Only true believers, people with a genuine, lively, active faith in Jesus as their Saviour, are living, fruitful branches of the Vine. When this union is disrupted, when the branch is severed from the Vine, it is followed by disastrous consequences.

Jesus says in our text, ***“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered.”*** This implies the awful possibility of being connected with Christ outwardly and yet being severed from Him in fact. Jesus here speaks of the hypocrites who indeed outwardly bear the name of the Lord Jesus but do not have the true saving faith and are devoid of the fruits found in the lives of true Christians.

In another parable Jesus speaks of them as tares among the wheat, and on still another occasion He speaks of them as bad fish who were caught in the Gospel net together with good fish. For practical examples we need only look at Judas and at Ananias and Sapphira. These indeed seemed attached as living branches to the true Vine, but eventually it became most apparent that they were withered.

It is well to note that the cause of the severance is to be sought in the branch, not in the true Vine; in the disciple, not in the Teacher. Jesus says, ***“If anyone does not abide in Me.”*** Jesus does not say: “If I will not abide in him.” This must follow eventually as a matter of course, but then it is not the cause but the effect.

That the cause of the withering is not to be sought in the Vine is apparent from the fact that there are other branches which are still flourishing and fruitful and that the Vine retains the withered branches until they fall of themselves or are lopped off by the Vinedresser or pruner. After such a branch has finally been severed from the true Vine, wounds are left behind which will heal only gradually.

Judas was retained by Jesus within the circle of the disciples until he went out into the night on that Maundy Thursday evening and severed his connection

entirely. It brought sorrow to the heart of the loving Saviour that this particular branch, at one time giving promise of abundant fruit, withered away and was finally severed completely.

It grieves the hearts of Christian parents when their children, who on the day of their confirmation gave the promise of a fruitful life in the Saviour, gradually drift away from the one true source of spiritual life and walk with the children of this world. Christians are saddened when those whom they considered fellow Christians turn from Christ and again join the world.

These words of our Saviour contain a solemn warning for all of us. They are designed to warn everyone of us against complacency and sinful security. Many a Christian has made a wonderful beginning and has given the promise of a lifetime of fruit bearing, but later he failed to abide in Christ and became a withered branch. Let everyone ask himself: Am I attached to Christ by a lively faith? Have I continued as a vigorous, lively branch, or do the fruits of my life indicate that a spiritual disease is at work within me? Oh, what a horrible thought that someone has become spiritually shrivelled and withered!

The final severance of the withered branch is followed by terrible consequences. Jesus speaks of this when He says, "***They gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.***" The terrible process is a gradual one. There is first, the unfruitfulness, and then there follows in succession the withering, the casting forth, the gathering, the casting into the fire, and finally the burning.

This process, though gradual, is nevertheless certain, and the end is inexpressibly horrible. It is the inevitable consequence of the severance of the union between the branch and the Vine, of the one-time believer and Christ. It spells spiritual failure, waste, and eternal destruction. See Judas that night, rope in hand! He lost his life in suicide and sealed his eternal doom.

These warning words of our Saviour must make an impression on us! Not the Christian who remains attached for a season or who is attached to Christ merely outwardly, but the believer who by a lively, fruitful faith is and remains attached until the end will be saved. We read in Matthew 24:13,<sup>13</sup> "***But he who endures to the end shall be saved.***" And in Revelation 2:10, "***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***" And again Jesus says in



Revelation 3:11, <sup>11</sup> ***“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”***

May God’s Holy Spirit keep us constant in faith. For this reason we pray,<sup>1</sup>

*Thou art the vine: O nourish  
The branches graft in Thee,  
And let them grow and flourish,  
And ever fruitful be;  
Thy Spirit pour within us,  
And let His gifts of grace  
To those good actions win us  
That best may show Thy praise. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hymn 519 v 6