

## **The Glorious Privilege Of Being A Branch Of The True Vine.**

Text: John 15:1-8

Suggested Hymns:

498, 381, 334, 519, 337

- 1) The True Vine Is Good And Perfect And Thus Makes The Branches Good And Fruitful
- 2) The Vinedresser Is Watchful So That All The Branches Remain Good And Fruitful
- 3) The Branches Draw Ever More Power For Greater Fruitfulness From The Vine

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,

Have you ever felt that it didn't pay to be a Christian? Have you ever let the joy of heaven fade and become beclouded by the sin and sorrow of earth? Or, what is still worse, have you ever lost your ambition to progress in Christian knowledge and Christian service because of disappointing circumstances and experiences in your everyday living?

If ever such thoughts have troubled you, if ever you need encouragement in your pilgrim life on this sinful earth, if ever you need real food for your soul (and all of us always do), you certainly can find it in those marvellous, meaningful

farewell words of Jesus to His disciples, written for our learning in the thirteenth to the seventeenth chapters of the Gospel according to St. John.

Read, and drink in that precious water of life. You shall taste and be satisfied. They are heart-to-heart words, telling you that Jesus is your Brother, and God is your Father. They are precious gems, guaranteeing you that your treasure is stored in heaven. They are Words of beautiful love, portraying the Saviour in the throes of death below, enjoying nevertheless visions of life above. They are earnest words, urging His disciples to stand fast and to go forward in deed and in truth.

Thus also our text, taken from these farewell words of Jesus, is a gem of Scripture. Although spoken to Christ's disciples 2,000 years ago, these words apply with equal certainty and seriousness to those who are His disciples today.

Let us now under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit consider together, *The Glorious Privilege of Being a Branch of the True Vine*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The True Vine Is Good And Perfect And Thus Makes The Branches Good And Fruitful**

Jesus is speaking in our text. He had just eaten the Passover meal with His disciples and had instituted the Lord's Supper immediately thereafter. Jesus knew what lay before Him in the next twenty-four hours. This was the beginning of that dreadful night of pain and sorrow, in which Judas would betray Him, Peter deny Him, and all the other disciples forsake Him and flee. Jesus knew all that. His omniscient eyes saw the events of this horrifying Maundy Thursday night and the terrifying Good Friday as a painful reality. He knew that He would be the centre of it all.

Yet He wasn't so concerned about Himself as He was about His disciples. He knew how weak they were. He saw that even though He would have to bear the entire load of sorrow and suffering, it would be a shocking offence to His beloved disciples. So He sought to forewarn them, to steel them against this storm of temptation and offence, that would break loose upon them and, if possible, would make a shipwreck of their faith. These disciples were His. He didn't want to lose any of them. He wanted them all to be where He was going, that they might see His glory, which the Father had given Him.

Since they had just used wine, the fruit of the vine, in the Passover meal and in the Lord's Supper, Jesus wove the idea of the vine and its branches into an illustration. He says ***"I am the true Vine."*** He is the real, the only true living and life-giving Vine. He lacks nothing in quantity or quality. He is not only good, He is perfect.

There is no flaw of any kind in Him, nothing weak, nothing bad, nothing false, no imitation. He is perfectly good through and through, because He is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.<sup>1</sup> In all that He thinks and does and says and gives, there is not the least poison of sin. He is from all eternity the holy, perfect Son of God and thus He remains, for He is the same yesterday and today and forever.

However, in order that He might be the true Vine, He took sin upon Himself. Paul tells us that God ***made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.***<sup>2</sup>

In order to give us, the branches, strength, He became weak; in order to earn a blessing for us, He permitted Himself to be cursed; in order to heal our wounds of sin, He permitted His body to be smitten and bruised; in order to earn life for us, He suffered the pains of death. Through His holy perfect life and, particularly, through His innocent substitutionary sacrifice of death, Jesus earned the exclusive right to say, ***"I am the true Vine."***

Because He is good, holy and perfect, every branch that grows must be good and God-pleasing. It cannot be otherwise. Whatever the branch draws from the Vine is good and must always have a good effect.

But how are these branches grafted into the Vine? How do they draw the sap and power from the true Vine? The Saviour answers in our text, <sup>3</sup> ***You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*** His Word is the channel, the means of grace, through which the Vine transmits its life-giving and fruit-bringing power to the branches.

All that Jesus is, and all that He has, He gives us through His Word. For that reason we pray,<sup>3</sup>

Lord, open Thou my heart to hear,  
And by Thy Word to me draw near;  
Let me Thy Word still pure retain,

Let me Thy child and heir remain.

Thy Word doth move the inmost heart,  
Thy Word doth perfect health impart,  
Thy Word my soul with joy doth bless,  
Thy Word brings peace and blessedness.

Every heart that drinks in this Word of God with sincerity, that applies every Bible text to itself and its individual and personal needs, will necessarily be a good and fruitful branch of the true Vine. The more it hears Jesus' Word, the closer it is drawn to Him, the more fruit it will bring forth.

The hymnist wrote,<sup>4</sup>

Oh, therefore, let us pray,  
Abide, O dear Redeemer,  
Among us with Thy Word,  
And thus now and hereafter  
True peace and joy afford.

The Saviour answers our prayer with the encouraging words of our text, ***“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.”***

It is the supreme delight of the Saviour to abide in us and to have us abide in Him. That is the only way, but it is also the sure way to make us bear fruit. Since He, as the Vine, is true and good, we, as branches abiding in Him, will also be good. His grace will cover all our sin. We can stand in the presence of God as beloved children, and the fruit we bring will be pleasing and acceptable; All that follows naturally: as the Vine, so the branches, so the fruit.

Because Jesus is full of love, yes, is Love itself, the Christians will also be filled with love and bring the finest fruit of Christian works of love in their lives. Even as Jesus, the Vine, always mercifully pitied the poor, helped the sick and the weak, and preached salvation from sin, so the branches, the Christians, will do likewise.

Wherever there is need of love and sympathy and mercy, there one will find the Christians actively concerned. That is the fruit that Christ works in them.

How could it be otherwise? They get all their power and strength for good from His goodness, grace, and mercy. Without Him they are nothing, they have nothing, they can do nothing. Only in Him they are strong and good and fruitful.

Do you see, my friends, what a glorious privilege it is to be a branch of the true Vine? By His perfect obedience to His Father's will and by His holy, innocent suffering and death, Jesus has earned the right and privilege to cancel every debt of sin held against us. We are free, absolutely free of every punishment and power of sin. The devil has not only lost the power to accuse us before God, he has also lost the power to control our lives and force us to succumb to his temptations. We are the free and happy children of God. I hope all of us are that. There is no greater joy on earth than to be a good and fruitful branch and remain one unto the end.

## **2. The Vinedresser Is Watchful So That All The Branches Remain Good And Fruitful**

Yes, but will that be the case? Will we, even if now we are branches, always remain such? That is left to the watchful care of the Vinedresser. Who is that? Jesus says, "*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*" Jesus' own dear Father, who has begotten Him from all eternity, planted Jesus as the Vine when He sent Him into the world to suffer and to die.

With watchful care the Father, as the Vinedresser, watches every branch in the Vine. And the Saviour says: "*<sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.*"

Some Christians permit the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life to drown out their faith in Jesus. Thus they become wild shoots or dead branches. These the Father will not permit to remain on the Vine. Such were Judas and Ananias and Sapphira and Demas. Of these the Saviour says further, "*<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.*"

Who has not seen instances of that in life? One can occasionally even see this withering going forward. Less and less Jesus' Word and the Sacraments are appreciated and used; more and more worldly, vain, reckless, godless, sometimes vicious and blasphemous ideas, utterances, and actions dominate the life.

Terrible as it is to see a body wither and shrivel under the blight of some wasting disease, it is unspeakably worse if the soul withers away because it has cut itself loose from the only source of life and strength, which is Christ, the Vine. With such branches there remains only one thing the Vinedresser can do, and that is to cut them off, gather them, and burn them. And the Vinedresser's eye is sharp and accurate. He makes no mistakes. He lets none on too long, nor does He cut any off too soon.

The Father loves the sinner just as much as Jesus does. He is not willing that any should perish. ***"A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench."***<sup>5</sup> As long as the tiniest spark of faith remains, some sap is still flowing from the Vine to the branch, and the Vinedresser will work hard to bring that branch back to health and vigour.

The Saviour assures us: ***"Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."*** All of us have a decaying and withering influence in us as long as we are in the flesh. Our flesh works against the good sap of the Vine and seeks to cause us to bring evil fruit. This power of the flesh the heavenly Father seeks to curb in us and, as much as possible, to purge us of it.

For that reason the loving Father sends us so many crosses and afflictions in this world. Through them He purges and cleanses us, that we might bring more fruit. Perhaps we are very impatient, murmur and complain easily when things go against our will. We need to be purged of that.

So the Father may send us a lingering disease to take this impatience from us and make room for us to bear the good fruit of patience. Perhaps we love our money too much and are stingy. So the Father permits our money to fly from us through doctor bills and other unexpected expenses, and through it we learn that it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in money.

Or again we may consider ourselves so very important and essential that we feel our farm or factory would fail without us. Suddenly the Lord lets an accident come to us; and even though we can't lead, the work goes on without us.

Perhaps we are easily led to worry. The Father knows that. In order to purge us, He sends us an especially heavy cross. Then we stop our worrying and find our only comfort in prayer. Thus the heavenly Father finds different ways to cut the evil out of our lives by depriving us of certain earthly things and leading us to know and trust His Word ever better.

All that does not harm us; it helps us; it purges and cleanses us and makes us better branches. That is our glorious privilege as branches of this true Vine: we know God the Father watches and keeps and cleanses us.

### **3. The Branches Draw Ever More Power For Greater Fruitfulness From The Vine**

All of us need that ever and again. In this world we will never be such good branches that there will be no chance to improve. Luther very wisely says: *“This life is not holiness, but a becoming holy; not health, but a becoming healthy; not a being, but a becoming; not a rest, but an exercise; it is not the end, but it is the way; all does not yet glow and sparkle, but all is being polished.”*

The closer we stick to the Saviour, the more fruit we will bear. There is scarcely a limit to the good works we can do when we draw our power and strength from Him, for He encourages us, *“**If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.**”* That is a challenging promise. The Vine says to all its branches, “You can have anything and everything good you want as long as you abide in Me.”

Do you want a stronger faith? Do you want more courage and ability to tell the Gospel to others? Do you want more wisdom and skill in your station as father or mother or son or daughter? Do you want to find a greater delight and joy in your stewardship of time and money? Do you want a greater desire to go to church, to read His Word? Just ask for it, and it shall be done unto you.

The Vine has all that is good and fruitful in itself and is ready and anxious to give it to us as its branches. There is no reason why we should lack anything that is good. It is all ready for us. All we need to do is to open the channel between us and the Vine through the use of His Word and through prayer.

In the words of the hymn let us turn daily to our Saviour and say,<sup>6</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.

And we can be sure of the immediate answer of the Saviour to such a prayer, because He tells us, “<sup>8</sup> ***By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.***” The more strength you draw from Me, the more good fruit you are bound to bear, the more My Father will be glorified.

Everything Jesus did and does serves ultimately to glorify His Father. Since we draw our strength from Jesus, all we do, whether we eat or drink or whatsoever we do, we, too, will do to the glory of God. In all our planning, in all our doing, the one object shall always be “*to God alone the glory.*” That will make life worth living and death worth dying.

Friends, picture to yourselves what a powerful influence for good these comforting words of the Saviour would have been for the disciples in that night and the next day had they comprehended and remembered them.

In effect, Jesus had told them, “*Keep trusting alone in Me, and all shall be well for you.*” They forgot them then and forsook Him and fled; but later on they remembered them. As abiding branches of the true Vine these same disciples that disappointed the Saviour here, brought such an abundance of fruit that they “turned the world upside down.”

In like measure you can be blessed as a branch of this Vine. Cling to your Saviour, trust Him implicitly, lean on Him completely, ask, seek, and knock for His help constantly through unceasing prayer, and live and work always for the glory of God. Scripture says, <sup>16</sup> ***Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.***<sup>7</sup>

You will encounter temptations, afflictions, and disappointments. Don't be discouraged. Remember your relationship to your Saviour; confidently turn to Him and say:<sup>8</sup>

I am a branch in Thee, the vine,

And nothing shall us sever.  
Since Thou, O Lord, wilt keep me Thine,  
My heart rejoices ever:  
For when I die, I die to Thee;  
Thy precious death hath won for me  
The life that never endeth.

That is your glorious privilege as a fruitful branch of the true Vine. 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> Hebrews 7:26

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 5:21

<sup>3</sup> Hymn 498

<sup>4</sup> Hymn 181

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 42:3

<sup>6</sup> Hymn 519

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:16

<sup>8</sup> Hymn 472