

Daily Devotions Monday 15th June 2020

John 15 vs 1-8

The image of the vine bearing fruit is a vivid one but nothing new. The Old Testament contains lots of similar imagery. Check out Psalm 80 vs 8 and 16. Isaiah chapter 5 is all about a vineyard and the choice vines in verse 2 refer to the people of Israel. If you read on you can almost hear the disappointment in God's voice when we read they only yielded bad fruit.

The imagery changes here as Jesus tells us in the 7th 'I am' statement that he is the true vine. Jesus is the vine and we are just the branches that draw energy from that vine.

The Father in heaven is the gardener who is tending the branches of the vine so that they bear maximum fruit as long as they continue to be fed by the sap of the vine.

I'm rubbish at this! I'm about to dig up a grapevine that for years, and despite my careful pruning, has never produced anything other than grapes that are hardly any bigger than the pips inside them! Thank goodness God knows what he is doing!

But what is the fruit that Jesus speaks of? In verse 8 he says it is something that brings glory to God. In verse 16 he speaks of fruit that will last.

Lynda and Luke are in competition to see who can grow the best pomegranate tree. Both started with just one seed and have various degrees of success. The point about fruit is that is that it is the means by which new life develops. I believe Christ is saying here that if we stay close to him and continue to feed on him that we will bear the fruit that will bring the new life in others that will bring glory to God.

'Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation' (1 Cor. 5 v 17)

We all want to be fruitful, to make a difference, and have an impact on the world. But according to Jesus, true fruitfulness, fruit that will last, comes only from being a branch on his vine. It maybe that significance and value from earthly achievements, a full inbox and recognition from peers or employers are clouding our judgement and distracting us from the real and lasting impact we can have by bearing fruit for Christ!

John 15 vs 2-6

Guess who comes top of the list if you google famous gardeners? Yep! Alan Titchmarsh. Closely followed by Monty Don. The essence of understanding these verses is knowing that the vine is in the hands of the wisest and greatest gardener of all time and that the vine itself is Christ!

The purpose of the vine is to produce fruit which appears on the branches. Staying close to the vine and feeding constantly on the spiritual nourishment that Jesus provides should mean we will bear fruit.

This fruit is not just soul winning. In Mat 7 v 16, Jesus says, by their fruit you will recognise them.' The fruit he is speaking of is the Christian character that is described in Gal 5 22-24 and 2 Peter 1 5-8. They are qualities that develop as a result of staying in Christ.

The idea of pruning in order to produce more fruit represents God's discipline of a Christian. A weak branch may have parts cut off to make it stronger in the same way that God uses trials and hardship to produce greater character.

Peter would have been listening to this speech and was about to have his pride knocked down when he realised he'd denied Christ 3 times! Yet he went on to preach an amazing sermon and win thousands for Christ after Pentecost. God's pruning in action!

A branch that bears no fruit is useless on the vine. Not only can it not be drawing nourishment from the vine but it could also be infecting the vine. The gardener cuts off this branch. Away from the vine it has no chance of the life it was intended to have.

Making a superficial commitment to Christ but never continuing in faith or turning back on a commitment is such a branch.

Judas is an example. Originally one of the disciples but he was cut off from the vine.

Pruning may be painful but it is much preferable to being cut off completely.

How do we relate to this analogy? Are we the dead branch no longer connected to the vine? Are we a branch grafted onto the vine and bearing much fruit? Or are we in the process of being pruned?

The strong message of Jesus is repeated by him 6 times in these first 8 verses.
'Remain in me!'

Daily devotions Wednesday 17th June 2020

John 15 vs 1-8 (esp. 4, 7)

We finished yesterday with the importance of, 'remain in me' but how do we do it?

We've all heard loads of sermons about reading our Bibles and praying but have we got into a mindset that says we need to move on to something else? We've read everything prayed everything and sung everything!

Have you heard the mantra about keeping your marriage fresh? Things we are supposed to do to keep the relationship strong? Have you ever reached a level of intimacy in a relationship you think can never be surpassed only to find that it has?

We were privileged last summer to hear Vaughan Roberts preach through the Songs of Solomon. Not only is this book about the level of intimacy between a man and a woman in marriage but it is also an allegory of the intimacy Jesus wants with his bride, the Church. Us!! The cross has removed any barriers that would prevent that intimacy.

In verse 7 Jesus tells us that remaining in him involves his words (reading the Bible) and prayer.

There are two different approaches to this.

A quick devotions time or a short passage of scripture when it fits in. Maybe a rushed prayer after that before we get on with the day. A Thursday meeting attendance and switching on the service on Sunday. Maybe even a trip to Word Alive or Keswick. Is this the kind of intimacy Jesus wants or is it us going through the motions?

Or do we spend quality time in studying God's word asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate us? We claim it is so important but do our habits reflect that? Do we dig deep to find stuff about God's love that we never knew before? Then do we spend time in prayer, opening up to God and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us?

I dare say those who spend the longest in study and prayer are the ones who experience the greatest intimacy with Jesus.

Jesus has made a way possible for us to experience him. How close we get to him is now dependent on us!

"Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tyre?" - Corrie ten Boom

Daily devotions Thursday 18th June 2020

John 15 vs 9-17

Despite talking about it lots we often dumb down God's love for us. When we do talk about it, we can often feel self-indulgent so we rather think of his love for the world (i.e. lots of people) rather than for us individually.

Here Jesus is talking to just 11 men but his words apply to each of us too.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. (v9) This sounds past tense but we know that God's love is from everlasting to everlasting. (Psalm 103 v 17) In other words, as it was in the past, so it will be in the future. A steadfast, never changing love.

Let these words sink in. He loves us the same way that God the Father loves him! God is love. His love is unconditional, flawless and perfect. Think of how he loves his son. And this love is directly for each of us individually as well as collectively.

Jesus had loved Peter and Andrew from before the beginning of time. He chose them on the shores of Galilee when he said, 'Follow me. I will make you fishers of men.' He promises them and us that they will remain in his love if they obey his commands. Though our salvation doesn't depend on our obedience, our intimacy with him is effected by our disobedience.

In verse 16, Jesus reiterates the above when he says to the disciples, 'I chose you.' Think of Jesus saying that to us. I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit.

Then he tells us how to accomplish it.

'Love each other as I have loved you.' (v12) We are not to love as the world loves. We're not to love as we feel people should be loved but we are to love as Jesus loves us. We have to put away self-interest and give freely of ourselves for their good!

This is our act of obedience. To love as he loves. We don't need to worry about the results or the side effects. Just carry out the command.

And the result in us is complete joy!! (v 11)

John 15 vs 18-25

When I was teaching I could never understand why it was that all the naughty kids were really popular and almost revered, whereas all the goody goodies were loathed! Though both the baddies and the goodies were part of the same world there was an opposing mind set between the two and here Jesus is describing something similar.

‘The world’ means all those people who operate in a system that says they are at the centre of the universe. If we say Jesus is at the centre of the universe we are opposed to them and will feel hostility.

There is a warning in v19. While it may not be wrong to be loved by people, we are not to be loved as ‘one of their own’. We should have different values, morals and beliefs than those of the world which are based on social pressure and secularism.

Jesus wants us to be prepared for this antagonism so he reminds us that as his servants, we should be ready to experience what the master has already experienced.

Jesus displayed perfect love for 3 years and yet became despised and rejected. Ours is an imperfect love in comparison but we should expect the same. Forewarned is forearmed!

In verses 22-25 Jesus speaks about the guilt for sin that is a result of him coming into the world. Sin, of course, existed before Christ came but failure now to recognise his coming and his mission results in guilt. Jesus uses the evidence of the miracles to point to his unity with the Father and that there can now be ‘no excuse’ (v22) for anyone not being able to acknowledge their sin and bow before Christ the sin bearer.

The hatred without reason shown towards the Father and the Son (v25) is a fulfilment of two prophecies which both make interesting reading. (Psalms 35v19 and 69v4)

Like the goody goodies at school, Christ was hated without reason!

We need not be surprised at the level of hatred shown towards Christianity. We should also expect to experience it personally if Christ is truly at the centre of our universe. Still we must keep the faith, be obedient, tell others about him, fix our eyes on Christ and leave the rest to him!

Daily devotions Saturday 20th June 2020 (Match day!!)

John 15 vs 26,27

Who did you hear about Christ from? Who explained his offer of salvation to you? And who told them before they told you? There is a process going on that these two verses are written about.

Do you remember those days back in school when you took part in a relay race? I loved running relay races because I felt part of a team. It drove me to do my best and, to be honest, I was happier about successfully passing on the baton than I was about the running.

Paul often used the analogy of running a race to describe the Christian life but he missed out on relays!! As a man who passed the baton of faith on more than anyone, that is a shame!

The race starts here. Jesus says to his 11 apostles - 'you must testify'. They told people who told people who told others until it eventually it was passed on to us! What an honour to be part of God's relay team.

Thanks be to God that the passing on of the baton isn't entirely up to our own skills. The Holy Spirit is in charge of the race and is in complete control of the success of the changeover. The words we say to people when we explain salvation may be very eloquent and very convincing but whether they are taken in or acted upon is up to the Holy Spirit. This is how the Spirit testifies about Jesus.

The baton is in our hand and that means we need to be ready to pass it on when the Holy Spirit presents the opportunity. Remember Colossians 4 vs 5-6 and be prepared.

The only difference of course is we never run out of batons!!

Let's thank God for those who taught us about salvation and ask him for help to run our section of the race. Let's be alert to hear when the Holy Spirit is directing us into possible conversations that will enable the baton to be passed on.