

August 25, 2019

John 15:1-11

"The Answer"

The key to marketing is convincing consumers to spend money on what they need, want, or think they can't do without. How many times a week are we bombarded with the message *you will soon discover how indispensable this product is?*

Have you ever thought about things you think are indispensable in your life? What gadget, gizmo, device, or appliance do you think you couldn't live without?

Today, we're going to talk about John 15 and what Jesus says is absolutely indispensable. Remember, John 15 captures what Jesus teaches on the night before he's going to die on the cross. This is an essential of the essentials.

John 15 is about a relationship. John 15 is about having a healthy

relationship with God. A healthy relationship with God is the only way to have a truly satisfying and significant life.

Jesus uses "fruitful" to describe a satisfying and significant life. Jesus says we live a fruitful life by abiding in him. In fact, chapter 15 is the 7th of the "I am " statements from Jesus:

1. *I am the Bread of Life.*
2. *I am the Light of the World.*
3. *I am the Gate.*
4. *I am the Good Shepherd.*
5. *I am the Resurrection and the Life.*
6. *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*
7. *I am the True Vine.*

The seventh is the most impressive of them all. Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. Let's look at what that means.

FIRST, WE ARE THE BRANCHES.

Fruitful people need a good handle on who they are. We need to know who we are. We are the branch. The branch stays attached to the Vine. It means we are under constant care of the Gardener. We're dependent on the Vine. And that's how growth happens. That's where growth happens.

God's plan is to bear His fruit in this world on the branches. That's us. God's plan is for us to bless His world with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That's who we are. We are the branches.

SECOND, GOD IS THE GARDENER.

Here's what's interesting. Jesus describes our place in God's world with a vineyard analogy. That's where we find truly satisfying and significant lives. Some people say that the vineyard is one of the most difficult kinds of agriculture to pursue. It takes constant care and hard work. God is the One who gives the care. He is the Gardener.

One of the standout truths of this analogy is where Jesus talks about how the Gardener prunes the branches. In some cases, He gathers the branches that aren't producing fruit and throws them into the fire. We need to understand what that means. It means we are not the Gardener. We don't find satisfying and significant lives by trying to figure out which

branches need to be cut off. That's God's job. We weren't made to do that. God does that.

Here's how I understand how that plays out in our lives. I need to speak very carefully and graciously here.

A 71-year-old Tennessee man was dying of cancer. He wanted his funeral to be at the first church he ever attended. He wanted his adult son to sing, "The Anchor Holds" at the service. Things seemed in order for the eventual service until the pastor found out the son was in a same-gender relationship, engaged to get married. The church said they could still have the funeral there and the son could sing, as long as his fiancé didn't attend.

Is that the way to a satisfying and significant life? God is the Gardener, not us. We are called to produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. How are we going to reflect the love of Christ? How are we going to engage the world?

Certainly not as judge, jury, and executioner.

Last year, I lead a funeral service for a fine Christian man. One of his adult daughters recently married her girlfriend. They sat with the rest of his family during the service. After the service, I extended my condolences to his daughter and her wife. I simply said, "He was a wonderful man. He would have made a great father-in-law."

We have to figure out what it means to be a branch. How are we going to reflect the love of Christ?

We are the branch. God is the Gardener.

THIRD, JESUS IS THE VINE.

What Jesus is saying here is quite simple. We can't find life in our family, in our heritage, in our political affiliations, in our jobs, in our money, in our possessions, or anything else like that. **Life is found only in Christ, and Christ alone.** Everything else is secondary...second rate...second hand. We can't find life anywhere else besides Jesus.

Philip Ng is the wealthiest man in Singapore. He is the island's largest private landlord and property developer. One of the things you need to know is it's unusual for someone to become a born-again Christian late in life, especially a person of great wealth. Jesus meant what he said when he said *it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.*

As he grew older, Ng knew something was missing from his life. He says, "What I've discovered is that all of us are broken. We all have a missing piece, and for me, I discovered that the missing piece was God through Jesus Christ."

I'm thinking here of what Jesus says. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Perhaps reflecting on John 15, Philip Ng says, "I was always in search for a better life, a better purpose, a better me, a better everything. I was just looking at the wrong things, but when I realized there is no better me or better things without Jesus, then it all snapped into place."

I am the vine...you are the branches, Jesus said.

We are the branches. God is the Gardener. Jesus is the Vine. God teaches us and corrects us and disciplines us and prunes us so we can do one beautiful thing. So we can do what Jesus does. So we can grow into Christ-likeness.

What does the branch do? The branch reproduces the life that's in the Vine. **The more we become like Christ, the more significant and satisfying our lives become.** We serve each other. We serve the needs of our community. We love each other. We love our community. We spread love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control wherever we go. That's what happens when you are grafted into the vine.

But don't misunderstand. Even when we are grafted into the vine, we will be trimmed. Any book on horticulture will deal extensively with pruning. Pruning is absolutely necessary for producing fruit. Pruning is how you get the best and most fruit from the branch.

When going through hardship or difficulty or set-back, instead of asking "Why me?" ask, "What are you teaching me, God? What do I need to learn? What good can come out of this for my life and your world?" That's why the Apostle Paul says *God works for good for those who are called according to his purpose*. When hardship or difficulty or set-back drives us deeper into the arms of Jesus Christ, we can see how it is producing deeper faith in our lives. God is pruning us to get the most fruit.

Have you ever been humbled by a daily circumstance? God uses that with which you struggle to strengthen you. When you understand that, you see life in a different way. You aren't a victim of your circumstances. You are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you. Amen? God prunes to strengthen.

And more than that, God prunes you to use you. In other words:

One day you will tell your story of how you've overcome what you're going through now, and it will become part of someone else's survival guide.

That's what branches do.

Because we are the branches and God is the Gardener and Jesus is the Vine, we produce fruit. And one more thing happens. We grow. We grow.

Three time in verse four Jesus uses the word *abide*. That's how we grow. We remain attached to the Vine.

Who here, as a child, had a special blanket or stuffed animal? Maybe some of you have safely stored it away. If you're a kid, and you have a special blanket or stuffed animal, God bless you. That's a good thing. Abiding is really simple. You are 100% committed to that blanket or stuffed animal. You are attached to it. That is abiding.

I love how Paul captures this sense of *abiding*:

Through Christ we can do all things.

What's the opposite of what Paul is saying? Without Christ we can do nothing. That connects beautifully with Jesus' image of the vine and the branches. A branch that is not bearing fruit is good for nothing. You can't

make furniture out of it. It burns too fast to be useful as firewood. It's useless.

A branch is made to bear fruit. We are made to be connected to Christ. We are made to be pruned by our Gardener. All for the sake of producing fruit.

How are we engaging the world? How are we loving each other? How are we loving our community? In most places, most of the time, are we loving and joyful and peaceful and patient and kind and good and faithful and gentle and self-controlled? When we fall down in any of these areas; in the places where we struggle to become the people God created us to be, that's where God prunes us so we can grow and get better.

As we abide in Christ, there's one final promise he makes:

These things I have spoken I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

What is Jesus talking about? He's talking about the joy of changed lives.

The joy of salvation. The joy of eternity together in heaven. That's the joy Jesus is talking about. That's the joy Jesus wants for us. Real joy. Have you

ever felt tears of joy streaming down your face? It happens in worship, or when you think about the blessings of your family, or you catch sight of God working in the lives of His people. Genuine joy has to do with the security you have in Jesus Christ that no matter what happens, you are safe in God's love. **The One who knows us best loves us most.**

Jesus is the Vine. God is the Gardener. We are the branches. The result of that truth is this:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

- Philippians 4:4

Let's say that together:

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS; AGAIN I WILL SAY, REJOICE.

Repeat those words every day. You do that, and you will abide. And your life will bear much fruit.