

When God Prunes You

Revival Institutes

By E. A. Johnston

sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Tuesday, January 5, 2021

Evangelism Awakening

Tampa, Florida 33607

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/9225

Throughout my Bible is the analogy of God as a husbandman, as a tiller of the soil, as a vine-dresser. All you have to do, friends, is read Isaiah 5 alongside John 15 to see this is so. Isaiah 5 relates the parable of the vineyard where the divine vine-dresser planted a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He exercised great care over it by fencing it in and gathering the stones out until it was planted with the choicest vine and the utmost care, and he even built a wine-press in the middle of it in the expectation of a great harvest of juicy, luscious grapes. But all the effort he expended was met with great disappointment for instead of the vineyard producing grapes, it merely brought forth wild grapes which were uneatable and usable. And in verse 4 of Isaiah 5, God laments,

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?

The analogy here is one of a sovereign Creator who takes an active interest in his creation. He has made a great investment in it and he's exercised much care over it and therefore expects much from it.

Now compare this passage with the one found in John 15 to see the great similarities of how God is represented the same way in both the Old and New Testament. Christ begins his dissertation of the 15th chapter of John with the pungent words,

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

In the Greek, the reading is more telling, "I," in contradistinction to anyone else, "am the genuine vine and my Father is the tiller of the soil." In other words, Jesus is the genuine article, the real deal, all others are fakes and frauds. And what Jesus says about God the Father is revealing, "my Father, the soil, the tiller of the soil." Here Christ brings in the imagery from Isaiah 5 of God as a divine vine-dresser.

In the second verse of John 15 we see an even more valid illustration of God's handiwork in the life of his children.

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

This suggests that if we are unproductive to God by being disobedient to God, he will not use us, he will simply set us aside and look for more fruit elsewhere. But if God sees fruit and a life of obedience to him, then he will get out his divine pruning knife and cut on us, he will strip us back so we can produce even more fruit and be even more useful to him.

But strangely, many would prefer a life of inactivity for God rather than go through the painful process of being useful to God. I guess this thought can be summed up what Adrian Rogers once told me. We were at the memorial service of Stephen Olford, which Dr. Rogers conducted, and after it was over, Adrian and I were out in the hallway of the church talking and Adrian Rogers asked me a question, he said, "Do you know what concerns me?" I said, "No, Dr. Rogers, what concerns you?" Well, he had his arms folded across his chest and he looked like a big Indian chief standing there and with a serious look in his eyes he said, "What concerns me is I see God calling up men like J. Sidlow Baxter and Stephen Olford and I look around and I don't see any come-uppers." I'll never forget his words because they ring so true. The reason why there aren't any come-uppers is because there aren't many men willing to be cut on by the divine pruning knife, they just settle in a comfortable ministry somewhere and maintain the status quo and they can crawl under the covers at night and go to sleep with a full belly and a satisfied conscience. But there are very few men in ministry today who are willing to go out on a limb for God by faith and cement themselves to a lacerating, cutting, personal stripping experience of being pruned by God's divine pruning knife. They just rather would avoid the pain so they settle for less. That's why they dish out lectures to be considered that have no authority from on high, and what they say lacks power.

John Song lived a life out on the full stretch for God and he was one of God's great sufferers as well. His sermons were so full of a higher power that he held his congregation spellbound for hours at a time. People would weep like they were at the final judgment. One minister said to John Song, "Your sermons are like a surgeon's scalpel." Another pastor confronted Song with the words, "I used to be skeptical when people said your sermon was like a powder keg. I do not have any doubts now." Well, what does a powder keg do? It makes a big bang and awakens and alarms. It blows up all false foundations. It gets your attention and holds your attention.

But too many congregations today prefer a life of compromise and conformity over a life of consistency and consecration. Too many pastors would rather live in a settled pastorate of acceptance and comfortableness rather than risk losing their reputations by going out on a limb for God and warning folks about the terrors of hell and the accountability of the last judgment. They'd rather make you laugh and entertain you than disturb your false peace and warn you of your danger of being burned up in a devil's hell. They'd rather preach nice little messages to soothe your conscience rather than warn you of God's demand of repentance and your absolute need of regeneration to get into God's holy heaven.

I'll never forget the time I saw God move in a group of pastors. I was preaching a Monday evening school on revival at the Stephen Olford Institute for Preaching in Memphis, TN. On that particular night, I brought with me two men whom I was

discipling at the time and I gave them strict instructions to sit at the back of the room and it was their job to spend that time in prayer for those men. On that particular evening, I was preaching out of the 15th chapter of John on the subject of the divine pruning knife, and about halfway through my message, I saw the faces of those pastors go from smiles and grins to become altered and they suddenly had looks of concern and God was pleased to move among those men that night and to disturb them and show them there was more to ministry than what they'd grown accustomed to, that many of us in ministry believed the more we do for God, the more useful we are to God. Baptists especially think along those terms. That's why we quit relying on God and instead rely on money and manpower to get the job done because it's quicker and we can still control it. But that night God showed those men that it's not in the things you do for God that produce the most activity for God, but that as Christians and followers of Christ Jesus, we are merely fruit-bearers.

Jesus said the branch that bears fruit is the pruned branch, meaning genuine service to God is being a clear and clean consecrated channel for God to move through and that the fruit that we bear is the actual work of God through us. We are only fruit-bearers, not fruit-producers. There's a difference between the two. Too many ministries are built on sand that washes away when the branch is taken away, whereas what lasts for God is what God has produced and we are only the branch that bears God's work in us and his activity through us. But we must be willing to put everything on the line for God, including our reputations, and we must be willing to go out on a limb for God by faith, and we must be willing to submit to his divine pruning knife on us and our ministries. And when you come to that place, friend, and when you understand that, friend, it'll completely change how you think about ministry and how you understand how God uses you in ministry to reach your generation with the gospel of Christ Jesus.

On that particular evening when I was through speaking, a line formed to greet me and in that line was an elderly black pastor who hugged me and with tears in his eyes he said, "I've been a pastor for nearly 50 years now and tonight I'm going to go home and when I get there, I'm going to get down and kneel by my bed and I'm going to pray and I'm going to ask God to get out his divine pruning knife on me and my ministry."

Well, that man was willing to experience change. How about you, friend? When God prunes you, it is preparation for God to use you but you must be willing to submit to his divine pruning knife. He won't force it on you. You must come willingly in submission to his working on you and in you and through you, and you must be willing to be stripped and cut and pruned and lacerated and shred to pieces in order to become more fruitful to him and more useful to him to reach your generation for Christ and eternity.