

*He Prunes the Fruitful*  
John 15:2  
*Abiding in Christ* (Dr. James Rosscup)  
Reading: Hebrews 12:7-13

Bethany Baptist Church (p.m.)  
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*...pray...*

How do you know a *good* branch from a *bad* branch?

### **Turn w/ me to John 15:1-11**

The big idea in Jesus' story is our *union* with Him. Jesus said, "*Abide in Me & I in You.*" Every Christian wants to be closer to Christ.

So it is tempting to think of this vineyard story as only a picture of the growing Christian, but it helps to realize that the vine(yard) was also a familiar **OT** symbol of *Israel*.

And all of Jesus' *Upper-Room friends* had questions about the Kingdom of God & Jesus as its King (Messiah).

So, it is likely that Jesus is claiming to be the ultimate realization of the Jews' hope for Israel's Messiah. So, to circle back to the back to the idea of union, life in the Kingdom is intimately dependent of Him.

We've also seen that part of Kingdom living is that God is inspecting us for fruit. If we bear fruit, God works in our life to help us bear even more fruit.

If we don't bear fruit, we are not really a Christian. And if we won't repent, we will be judged.

Tonight we'll continue to parse Jesus' allegory, by looking at the idea of *pruning*. (from *Dr. James Rosscup & "Abiding in Christ"*):

1. – the **individuals** who are pruned (fruitful branches).
2. – the *idea* of pruning (cleansing).
3. – the *intent* of pruning (more fruit).
4. – the *instrument* for pruning (Word).

***The individuals pictured by the fruitful branches are Christians. Not some Christians – all Christians.***

1. There are only **two** kinds of branch in Jesus' story and only two outcomes for them: pruning or burning (cleansing or purging).
  - a. To be very clear, there is no such thing as a true Christian who never bears biblical fruit.
2. We saw last time that the Vinedresser's (Heavenly Father) role is to inspect the branches and do what needs to be done to increase the vineyard's yield.
  - a. How does He distinguish a good branch from a bad branch?
    - i. *Fruit.* Not what the branch looks like, nor how happy it seems.
    - ii. Jesus' said (Mt 7) – "*By their fruit you will know them...every good tree bears good fruit.*"
3. But the pruning process implies that a good branch is not always healthy or full fruitful.
  - a. The branch might be *diseased*. You or I might have fallen into sin.
  - b. The branch might be "*sub-fruitful*." We might be spiritually *distracted*.
4. Pruning sounds *painful* (maybe it will be)! But when you sense God's hand on you, remember:
  - a. God examines *every* branch and *every* branch He prunes. *God cares about you* & is looking after you & wants the very best for you.
  - b. There are many examples of God's pruning in Scripture: Noah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Jonah, Hezekiah, Peter, Paul. *Can you think of any others?*
  - c. When He prunes us this is an assurance that we are truly Christian.

- d. The time for you to worry is if you have fallen into *willful & prolonged* sin and God *doesn't* prune you!
    - i. What if God had never gone after Jonah!
5. Sumi it up: Every real Christian bears fruit & gets pruned to bear more fruit.

***This is a parable – let's think a little more about the idea (picture) of pruning.***

1. In a real vineyard real branches need to be “cleansed” (“pruned”).
  - a. For example, *shoots (suckers)* need to be pruned to get maximum life to fruitful branches.
  - b. Older writings described several types of pruning: *pinching off shoots, topping the vine to control its height and concentrate its growth, thinning the fruit, pruning shoots & diseased wood, and for winter – cutting the branches way back*
  - c. In the orchard, fruit trees have the tiny new fruit thinned out in the Spring to get bigger, better fruit.
2. All of which Jesus' implies to remind us that spiritual branches need to be cleansed /pruned.
  - a. Whatever *hinders fruitfulness* is trimmed away.
  - b. Unfruitful *shoots (suckers)* are like *distractions*, along with spiritual *diseases & pests*.
  - c. *Definite sin (willful)* that has been *tolerated/pursued* is *pruned* (conviction, conscience).
  - d. Sins that have been carelessly *fallen into* or *imbedded from past* are discovered in *God's Word* (conscience & conviction).

3. As a part of the pruning process, God's Word *exposes* but *we are responsible* to deal w/ our sin.
  - a. You & I participate, under God's hand, in pruning away the unfruitful parts of our lives!
4. Our sin is often pruned away by *suffering*. (And suffering also strengthens our faith, Jas 1, Job).
  - a. That suffering can take the shape of: *sickness, problems, hardships, loss of goods, slander, toil, loss of loved ones, concerns for others, grief over others spiritual weakness, persecution, oppression, war.*
  - b. Yet as we'll see in a few minutes, suffering is not the only or ultimate pruning knife in the hand of the Vinedresser.
5. In review, pruning in the *natural* world & the *spiritual* world is an ongoing and varied process. The point is *fruit!*

*The point is fruit, yet there is more we can say about God's intent in pruning us.*

1. When we feel the pruning shears upon our lives, we may complain at first. Remind yourself that God's purpose in pruning is always good.
  - a. After years of bearing fruit & being further pruned (over & again), Joseph told his fearful brothers: *You meant it for evil but God meant it for good.*
2. Under the pain of the trimming knife, we may question Him (Is God good? ...wise? ...powerful?).
  - a. Even righteous Job bent under the extreme pressures that God allowed in His life.
3. We are to *recognize* His purpose & *rest* in His purpose.
  - a. We've said it over & over and it's very clear, God's purpose in pruning every Christian is to help time bear more fruit!
  - b. This picture & purpose & process is very similar to another picture we find in the NT (Heb 12:4-11) where God is compared to a *loving & intentional* father who disciplines his children for good.
    - i. We chasten our kids to prepare them to successfully take their place in the world, to guide them into productive adulthood.
    - ii. God disciplines us in that picture for our *holiness*.
    - iii. Heb 12: *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful, yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of **righteousness (holiness)**.*
  - c. In other NT illustrations of sanctification, our relationship to God uses pictures of a soldier, athlete, farmer (like our vinedresser), & refiner.
4. When we are assured of God's good purposes, we can begin to rest in God's pruning process even if we don't understand every details.

6. Just remember that pruning is always in God's hands & always to make you more fruitful.

*I've used some different terms for the instruments God uses to prune. Older literature speaks of a variety of vinedressing knives. In my own collection of yard tools I have some heavy duty pruning shears. ... What does God use?*

1. Dr. Rosscup points out that the traditional vinedresser has a variety of knives to prune with.
2. But the Father has, basically, one sharp pruning instrument: His Word.
3. If you think about that for just a moment, you might have a question?  
*Doesn't God also trim us with trials?*
4. The short answer is *yes*, and 1 Pt 1:6-7 reminds us that trials are like a *refining fire*, which yields very similar to this story. Perhaps you could visualize *trials* as an instrument which *prepares* the Christian for the *vinedresser's knife*.
  - a. Spurgeon tries to resolve the question like this: *Affliction is the handle of the knife; affliction is the grindstone that sharpens up the word...affliction makes us ready to hear the word.*
  - b. And consider these thoughts on the relationship between trials & Scripture:
    - i. You can be pruned by the Bible alone (e.g. thru QT or sermon).
    - ii. You can be pruned by suffering plus the Word (explaining your trial's reason & nature & purpose).
    - iii. But you *can't* be pruned by suffering **w/o light** from the Word (*many experience trials but never receive any spiritual benefit because they don't turn to God through His Word*).

5. To chase this further: your *initial cleansing* is **salvation**, which is then followed then by the *lifelong cleansing* **of** sanctification (cf Peter in Upper Room & cleansing of feet).
- a. Since your spiritual cleansing *started* with the word (gospel at salvation) then your *ongoing spiritual cleansing* logically uses the same means (again, compare v.3 to v.2).
    - i. **V.3** – *you are already clean because of the word* – salvation.
    - ii. **V.2** – *every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so it may bear more fruit* – sanctification, fruit bearing.
    - iii. In just a few hours Jesus would pray in Gethsemane (Jn 17:17) – “*Sanctify them in the truth, thy Word is truth.*”
6. Once again, Jesus instructs of the importance of reading & knowing our Bibles. God may prepare with trials but the final instrument is His Word.

[Close with quote by Andrew Murray (Rosscup – p.61).]

Beloved, God your Father will make you more *fruitful*, more *holy*, more *like* His Son!

And that...*is a good thing!*

...*pray*...