

Branch Life - John 15 - Sermon 3 of 5

by Roy Hession

The vine dresser's work is to help us grow in humility and dependence on God, and to cut away any dead or self-sufficient parts in order to produce more fruit.

Duration: 1:02:24

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:21, John 15:1-3, John 15:5-6

Topics: "Faith Testing", "Fruitfulness In Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of the 'age-long minute' when we face challenges and trials. He emphasizes that this minute is a crucial opportunity to have faith in God's goodness and to allow our faith to be tested and refined. The preacher also discusses the concept of branch life, which is a unique experience known only to believers. He references John 15 and highlights the importance of bearing fruit and being cleansed by God in order to bring forth more fruit. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the need for evidence of our faith, both internally and externally, as emphasized in John's epistle.

Transcript

We're going to look once again at John 15 and we're going to read just the first three verses of this chapter, this portion we're looking at, taking little sections of this great allegory of the vine and the branches. And once again I remind you we're seeking to understand what branch life is. It's something the world knows nothing of, but we are being taught this by the Lord.

Jesus says to us then, I am the true vine and my father is the husbandman, or better, as in the revised versions, the vine dresser. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away. And every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth literally, as in other versions, he cleanseth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Now this morning we are passing on to look at the activity, not of the vine, nor of the branch, but of the vine dresser. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in this.

Jesus is the vine, by his Spirit he lives again in the branch, and the father is the vine dresser. And his work, it would seem, is to see to the relationship, the ongoing relationship of branch and vine. This passage would seem to put a lot of emphasis on our abiding in him, our ongoing relationship with him.

But lest that should seem too onerous a responsibility for us to be handling, the father is the vine dresser. And you're not left to try and do your abiding on your own. He's the vine dresser whose work it is to see to our relationship with Jesus, to deal with it, to adjust it, to show us where we're not abiding, and help us to come back, and so on.

So isn't it good that we've got a vine dresser? The father, my father, says Jesus, is the vine dresser. And what we've got in this portion is how he deals, first with the unfruitful branch, and then how he deals with the fruitful branch. For he deals with both.

You can understand him doing something about the unfruitful branch. But strange he does something about the fruitful branch. He's not content with the fruit that's dead, he wants more.

A bit greedy, if you like. And so the mere fact that the branch is bearing fruit doesn't get a pat on the back, merely though he loves it, and praise is encouraged with his intent on more fruit. And to that extent, he has to deal with the branch that is bearing fruit.

Now what we've really got, and I've realized that as I've been studying this subject this morning, is really two messages. The message about the unfruitful branch, and the message about the fruitful branch. And would that it were possible to give a morning to each.

But there are other subjects we want to cover in the following. So, God helping us, we'll try and look at these two very important aspects. Now the natural thing would, of course, would be to deal with the question of the unfruitful branch first, and then the fruitful branch afterwards.

But for various reasons I want to reverse that. And I want to speak, first of all, about the fruitful branch. Well, he says, every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away.

We shall look in a moment and see what that means. And it always takes you by surprise how the sentence is completed. You would say, but every branch in me that beareth fruit, he pats on the back or does something like that.

But no, and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanses it, or purges it, as the authorized version has, that it may bear more fruit. May I just say that the word purge in the authorized is simply the word in many other places translated cleansing. And so what he does with the branch that knows itself but a branch in Jesus the vine, and is bringing forth to the blessing of others fruit, is he cleanses it.

Now how do you actually, in the physical realm, cleanse a branch? And there's no doubt at all that what is referred to here is what we call today pruning. So where a branch is bearing fruit, he prunes it. He doesn't do that to the one that isn't.

It says that he does something else to that one. But once a man learns these blessed lessons, and is beginning to have evidences that Christ is living in him, not only to his own blessing, but to the blessing of others, then he does this further work of pruning. Now I'm no horticulturist.

I'm a city dweller of city dwellers. But even I know a little bit what pruning is. It looks a most drastic operation.

At a certain time of the year, after the former season of fruit bearing has taken place, the gardener, the horticulturist, the agriculturist, takes a knife and he cuts back those branches, until there seems to be

hardly any branch left. You would like to stop him. Hey man, what are you doing? You're wrecking that vine, you're wrecking that fruit tree.

But he knows, unless he cuts those branches back, there won't be much fruit the next year. But if he does, there may well be much more fruit the next year than this year. Cutting back those branches.

And this is a very important part of branch life. Letting go. In fact, you don't have a lot of choice sometimes.

Pruners. Cut back the branch. Cut away the dead wood, so that it will now bring forth more fruit.

To those innocent at this sort of thing, the first time they see it, it's quite extraordinary. Even the trees that line our roads and our suburbs, that have the attention of the council workers, they prune those trees. In a certain time of the year they look barren, they look helpless.

They had such a wonderful foliage, at one time of the year. Now they're all cut back, there's just the stem and gnarled ends only. Roots, or whatever you like to call it, of those branches.

And it is certainly true with vines. Every year, there's this pruning work, what is here called purging or cleansing. It isn't quite, I know, I don't know why, I think, I know the reason why the authorised version said purging, because cleansing didn't seem strong enough.

But even purging does not give us this picture, which I think is obviously intended of pruning. This cutting back the branch. And already, there are few of us who haven't known some of this pruning operation of our heavenly vine dresser.

It is really beneficent in its intention that there may be more fruit. And this is the way. Now what is most interesting is this, that that which is cut back on a vine or any other tree or fruit-bearing plant, is the product of former fruit-bearing.

It started so small after the pruning, and when the spring came. And it grew, and the branch made up quite rapidly, it seemed, for what had been taken away. And there was a wonderful fruit.

And as it produced the fruit, it grew big. And it is that bigness, now that the fruit season is over, that has got to be cut back. And that which has to be cut back in us, is so often the product of former fruit-bearing.

You felt so weak, you depended so completely on Jesus. I'm the helpless branch, O Lord, but you're the mighty vine. And he answered in situations in a wonderful way.

And there was fruit in your life, the fruit of the Spirit. People were blessed, they tasted of it, they were drawn to Christ, maybe. You were you, while you were little in your own sight.

And that being little in our own sight is of prime importance. It's part of branch life, to remain to your dying day, a helpless, empty branch in itself, knowing it cannot bear fruit in itself, that it's the product of the vine that's in us. But as a result of us having these blessed experiences, we get big again.

I'm being used, I am. I've got gifts, I am. I've been asked to be leader of this, the leader of that.

And you begin to think yourself rather more important than the other branch. You think you know how. And while those sort of attitudes persist in our lives, that's going to be the virtual end of any increase in our fruit

that bearing.

Our experience will be that of decreasing fruit. Every year the branch gets bigger because of the little, even the little bit it produces, adds to its increase. And therefore, if God is going to have more fruit from us, he's got to prove, he's got to cut back that dead, and it is dead, self-life.

And I say again, so often, it's the product of the blessing of God in the past even. And we begin to entertain illusions about ourselves, that we are somebody. And we cease to be a little in our own sight.

Very often we don't think this is the case. Between us and God, we still pray the same way. But it comes out in your relationship with other people.

That's what finds us out. I believe sometimes we can't see anything wrong in our relationship with God. But it isn't right in our relationship with other people.

And that is the clue. What you are to others, Jesus says you are to me. In as much as you've done it to them, you have done it.

And it's the fruitful Christian. Because of his very fruitfulness, that needs constantly to be cut back, decides, constantly pruned. Well, how does he do it? Well, Jesus said, verse 3, now ye are clean, or purged, or cut back, through the word that I've spoken unto you.

Now this is really rather nice, now you're clean. He didn't say you've got to go on being clean. Now look here, okay, he said, now take it.

I've been talking to you, I've been dealing with you, you have to see an awful lot about yourselves. Now take it, you're clean. Don't be emphasizing, I've yet to have more and more.

If you've responded to light, God says, now you're clean. Until later, he has something more to deal with you about. But as of now, you can be rejoicing in the Lord, if you've responded to the light he's given you.

And the light he gives you, is through his word. Now ye are clean, through the word which I have spoken unto you. The word of God is that which is intended to convict us of self, of pride, of self-sufficiency, of wanting to be somebody, of despising others.

Thank God for the word of God. It isn't only in reading your Bible, it's hearing it, it's sitting under it. This is why sitting under the word of God is an essential part in the Christian life.

You don't only read the word, you're to sit under it. And we ministers, my dear friend, you're in a tremendous privileged position, an important position, as they sit under the word that you utter. This is his instrument for the perfecting of the saints.

And I cannot think of anything more necessary than a great enlargement in the heart and spirits of those that minister the word. That the sheep look up so often and are not fed, and hearts are not searched, and the service and the organizations seem to be more important than the word. I want to plead for those who are in any sense ministering the word, for us all to see the primacy of the word of God.

Let the other thing go, if something's got to go, and give your time to this holy task. This is God's instrument for the perfecting of the saints. Is it first in our list of priorities? And it's the same for all of us, even if we aren't preaching this word ought to be in the place of supremacy.

And may I tell you those in full-time Christian service have to fight for time for this, as much as those who are in secular work. Theoretically you say they've got all the time in the day, but I don't know, that old telephone and those callers, and that administration they've got to do. It's a fight.

But fight it. The word is that by which the saints are perfected. It's that which shows the inroads of ourself into our lives.

And we, the word of God, ought to search our hearts. Are your people, I'm asking you, are their hearts being searched? As God would want to search them. In the same way he encourages.

I will not always chide, neither will I be wrothed forever. For the spirit would fail before me, and the souls that I have made. It's not only challenge, challenge, search, search.

It's encouragement, encouragement. There's good news for bad people, in the word of God. Let's preach it.

Let's see our people relax, let's see the joy come. Oh, now ye are clean, and encouraged and built up through the word that I've spoken unto you. And we on our part have got to respond to that word, and let ourselves be convicted.

One of the beautiful things, I think, of these meetings God's given us, is by and large it's a people. Who are ready to be convicted. I find that folks in these conferences, they don't have to have it all so closely applied.

Everybody's applying the word to themselves. Would that that were more general, and would that it were true of everybody here. And in that way, God shows us how self has come in.

And through that means, he cuts that branch back, to become that little, small, helpless branch, but which nonetheless is united to Christ the living thine and in whom he lives again his life. But it isn't only through the word that he prunes the branch, but through all sorts of forms of chastening. Not only direct conviction of sin, but chastening, suffering, difficulties, opposition, injustices.

It's limitless. Now please understand that chastening is not punishment. Punishment is that which the judge meets out, because it's deserved, and whether or not the man in the dock repents makes no difference.

The law has to go its way. But chastening is always restorative in its intention, not punitive. Never say, God is punishing me.

I don't think the unsaved need ever say or should say that. They do, because they don't know the God they're dealing with. He's punishing me for my sins.

My dear friend, that suffering you're enduring could never be an adequate punishment for sin. The only adequate punishment for sin is that which Jesus bore in his body on the tree. He's exhausted the penal aspect due to sin.

What comes to us is not punitive, but restorative in its intention. And inasmuch as the most obedient saint has these sufferings, it can only be, obedient as he is, there are still further areas where he needs to return to the Lord. We underestimate the tremendous recovery operation which God is undertaking in us.

We underestimate the tremendous debark of the fall. How corrupted is human nature, and this recovery operation begins with the new birth, but only begins there. It goes on to the end, to recover in us the large effects of Adam's fall.

And so it's a God of love and grace who prunes the barge by means of chastening. If you will turn to Hebrews 13, this is the chapter which, in which the writer to the Hebrews, whom I take to be none other than Paul, Hebrews 12 rather, deals with this whole matter of chastening. Verse 11, now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous.

Oh, no doubt at all, suffering, suffering. Injustice is injustice. Being the butt of other people's tongues is painful.

It's not joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward. Oh, there's a blessed afterward. To God's chastenings of his children, nevertheless afterward, it yielded, here we are, the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

It's had the effect of bringing the branch back to its true place. But notice, unto them which are exercised thereby. You can have suffering, you get no good out of it because you aren't exercised thereby.

You say, you haven't said, what God, what is God teaching me? Is he working in me a more humble chastened spirit than I had before? Is there some particular thing? He's trying to reach in very often, it's not a general humility he's working, though that is sometimes the case. But it may be specific things. We need to be exercised thereby.

There's a book that's come out these days, you've probably seen other books or don't waste your sorrows, don't waste them. They're intended for good to those that are exercised thereby. They're intended to bring the branch down to that weak dependent place which subtly it may have forsaken.

And in as much as the fall consisted in a refusal of the branch, the branch life, Adam wanted to be the vine and not the branch, may be their degrees of dependence on the vine that we still need even further. Now when we're in the midst of this chastening, it sometimes seems as if it's never going to end. You can't see a light at the end of the tunnel, don't you believe it? Don't you believe it? Oh some beautiful things are said to the saints when God is having to use the pruning knife.

I'm looking at Psalm 30 and verse 5. His anger endureth but a moment, his favour for a lifetime. Don't be frightened of this word anger in the Old Testament or raw. It's a beautiful sweet loving word and it's applied to his own people Israel as much as indeed more than to the Gentiles that know not God.

Anger is a horrid word in man. A horrid thing in man is always self-inspired. It's I who's being touched off and I don't like it.

God's anger is never self-inspired, it's always love-inspired. That which you've done has displeased him. What sort of a parent is he or she who can see things done by children and doesn't correct and chasten them? They're failing in love.

And the Old Testament, without any inhibition, talks about the anger of the Lord. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel after Achan had stolen those goods. And he said a victory was defeat.

But he was good. They had to find out what it was. They had to know how to walk in obedience with God.

And once that was put right, victory was theirs and Jehovah was operating on their behalf as never before. Now this anger then, never back off from the Old Testament. It's a lovely word.

I've sometimes wanted to give a study on this sweet lovely word, the anger. I've been under it, so have you. He's had to show me things.

He's had to humble me. And when I said, yes Lord, you're right and I'm wrong, how glad and thank you Lord. You know the simple truth is, Jesus will never let you down, but thank God he won't let you off.

And I don't want to be let off. Not really. Deep down at first it isn't easy.

But this that he had to do for us in one way or another, it endureth but a moment. What is normal and natural for him to give us is favor. His anger endureth but a moment.

His favor for a lifetime. Don't you believe this is going on forever. Amy Carmichael has a lovely poem.

I think it must be based on that incident when the storm hit that little boat and Jesus was asleep in the stern and they wake him up. And she talks about that age-long minute when thou art silent and the winds are high. It was only a minute before he woke up and said, peace be still.

But to them in the middle of it, it seemed an age. Don't despair. You're not to faint.

Be discouraged when you're chastened of the Lord. Because it's he whom the Lord loves that he chastens. And when it's over, it was only a moment.

And you thank him for it. Age-long minute. And it's that minute which is terribly important.

How you behave in it. You know you can only change the imagery. You can only score runs when you've been bowled against.

It's pretty hard facing that fast bowler. But listen man, it's your own chance of making any runs. When he's taken off and the tufts are drawn, you've lost your chance.

And it's in that age-long minute that you have the chance to have faith in grace tested. Distill in that minute to believe in the goodness of God. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take.

The crowds you so much dread are big with mercy and will break in blessings on your head. And so, in every branch that beareth fruit, he prunes it. And so, there's a reinducement for us to say yes to his convictions.

And even if it comes from another's word to you. And that's the real fellowship. When we're so free that one brother can share with another his sorrow that this and that is being manifested.

Say yes. And the end is this. You're going to be once again the helpless branch.

You're not the big Christian. You're not the big preacher. Just that helpless branch, once again, join to the mighty vine and the fruit will go on appearing.

Only so. Isn't that gracious? This gracious work of the heavenly vine dresser. Well now, the other one, and it comes first.

And of course, ought to be, ought to have been dealt with first. But for various reasons, I wanted to leave what we've got to think about with regard to the unfruitful branch to the second half. Going back to John 15.

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away. Before we look at it further, may I say something more than I've already said about fruit on the branch. Let it be said again, it is not something we do.

To be a fruitful branch, we don't have to try more and be kinder and sweeter and more gracious or more devout in our quiet times. Fruit is simply the result of Jesus dwelling within by his Holy Spirit. It's fruit.

And the fruit comes from Jesus. It's the natural consequence of Jesus dwelling within and you being in the confessed place of nothing more than a helpless branch, but joining to him. If you should feel yourself to be something of an unfruitful branch, the situation will not be changed by us trying to tie on to the end of the branch some of these Christian qualities.

It will not be changed by us saying, well now, if I pray more and I'm more diligent in my reading of the scriptures, that would lead me to abiding. Listen, that's not abiding, that's the fruit of abiding. Even having longer times of prayer isn't abiding, isn't remaining in the vine.

It's the fruit of it. The man who's really a branch united to Christ and counting on the vine in that way, will be so full of spiritual life, he'll want and have an appetite. What's the use of getting up early to have your longer devotions, if when you get your Bible, you can't get much out of it.

And you don't know how to use that longer period. No, no, even that is a simple fruit of Christ within. These things are not the ways to Christ, this is often thought.

But Christ, appropriated by the weakest, most helpless branch, is the way to these things. And we can put the cart before the call. What is needed is simply for us to possess Christ, to appropriate him.

As we've been singing, I know he's mine. This friend so dear, he lives in me, he's ever near. But, but, but, it could be that some of us don't know it.

They're not sure. If you were asked, are you truly saved? Are you truly grafted into Christ? You say, I hope so. Or I think so.

You don't know it. There's a lurking doubt. And maybe those doubts are fully justified.

You may pass as a branch. Everybody thinks you are. You may think you're a branch yourself in him, but you may not be.

And that is going to be proved by the fruit. By their fruits, you shall know them. And if a branch is void of fruit, void of evidence, there's every reason for that man to believe, I'm not in Christ yet.

Now, I don't mind people's faith being shaken as to how they stand. In some cases, it ought to be shaken because they're not really there. Some people say, I'm a Christian, but not a committed one.

There's no such division It may be we're not Christians at all. Or we look like one, we've been brought up as one, and we go to the church, and we've been confirmed, and so on. But the branch, that person may be among the other ones, and may look like the other ones, but the union has never really been made effectual.

And later, it talks about such a branch is withered. Verse 6. Now, there's a withered branch. And that could picture a person whose spiritual life is withered.

There's no fruit on it. It's an oak branch. There's no acorns.

Probably wouldn't be at this time of the year in any case. But there are leaves. You know that fig tree where Jesus came along and found there was nothing but leaves there.

Leaves represent the profession of being a Christian. Well, there's certainly leaves. But they don't look in very good shape.

And very soon they'll drop off. And so it is, we can be in this state of withered. Now, there are two reasons why, if some of us can see ourselves in that.

The first is, as I've said, it's never really happened. And it isn't true today. My soul is now united to Christ the living body.

His love I once had slighted, but now I know him not. That's one reason. And the other reason is, although we are united to Christ, we're not remaining.

And we are beginning to see what this abiding, this remaining in him is. And the extraordinary thing is this. If you, as a true believer, are nonetheless not remaining in him as a branch in the vine, trying to be a vine yourself, or running your own life independent of him, there's not going to be outwardly a lot of difference in current experience as one who's never had that experience.

Both are pictured like that. Now, in this verse too, every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, has the former in view. I believe that verse is speaking of one who looked like a Christian, outwardly, never was at all.

Every branch. I know it says in me, but that is where you, the Lord had to make, had to adapt his meaning to the allegory. And no allegory gives you the whole picture.

But this is consistent with something you get right the way through the New Testament. Solemn warnings against those who've got the outward profession, never had the real thing. It's what the old writers used to call false professors.

We don't use that phrase before. Professor to us is someone at a university. But not the old-time writers, false professors, those who profess, but have never really possessed.

And that is proved by lack of fruit. Jesus said it. And what warnings there are.

Why, there's the parable of the ten virgins, five wise, five foolish. The foolish ones had fairly good lamps, as good as anybody else's. But they got no oil in the lamps.

And when they knocked at the door, the bridegroom said, depart from me, I never knew you. You've never been on the list of guests. Your gate crashed into utter darkness.

And someone may have a wonderful lamp. And yet they're going to one day hear the solemn words, depart from me. There were those who will one day say, but Lord, did we not cast out demons in thy name? Did we not do wonderful mighty works in thy name? They look like branches.

They thought they were branches in him. But they never were. And Jesus will have to say, depart from me, I never knew you.

And so this verse here is consistent with a whole tribe of verses warning the false professor of his position of imminent peril. I want to tell you I've been, how long is it, over 40 years as an evangelist. I haven't seen many white beaters saved in that time.

I haven't seen an awful lot of drunkards saved. But I have seen an awful lot of church members saved, who looked as if they were in Christ, but they weren't. And they made the appalling discovery and to their joy, they came to Jesus, they embraced him as their personal savior, and they were able to say, I know he's mine, this friend so dear.

And it's all determined, well, as far as our estimate of ourselves is concerned, by fruit. Will you turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 5. 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Prove, test your own selves.

Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ be in you, except ye be reprobate. Now this word reprobate is a word that is used by the metal assayer. We don't use it that way.

But in Elizabethan English they did. In Jeremiah, talking about Israel, it says, reprobate silver shall men call them. That is, the assayer tests gold or silver, or that which purports to be, to see if it really is that metal, and if it comes up to the quality it should be.

And this is what he's got in mind. The distinguishing mark, he says, about the one who's in Christ is that Christ is in him. That's the only real basic thing that distinguishes us from the rest.

Know ye not that Jesus Christ be in you, except if on test you prove to be counterfeit. And so what we've got here, in John 15, and elsewhere, is the possibility of us being counterfeit Christians. It isn't that we do it deliberately always.

We can be playing an act. But very often we just don't know it. We deceive ourselves.

And there's evidence with Christ is in us. There are three sorts of assurance of salvation. That is being sure.

First of all, there's external assurance. The external word of God that says, Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast him out. You may not feel it.

You may not have no great emotion. But if you come, you've got God's unbreakable word. He hasn't cast you out.

For Christ's sake, he's accepted you, forgiven you, and made you his child. I don't always see it. In the final analysis, I rest on the external word of God.

Then there's a second way of assurance, and that's internal. And we read in scripture about the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we're the children of God. And we're not left with only an external assurance, but an internal experimental one.

And the dear Holy Spirit just whispers that God's my father, and Jesus my savior. I've got the word too, but I've got the experience of it. And no one can tell you otherwise when you enjoy the inner witness of the

spirit.

I know he's mine by the word, but by this inner witness. But it wouldn't be enough to emphasize the inner witness too much, because it's the subjective. You might say, hey, where's the inner witness this morning? And that may well vary your consciousness of it, but the external word is still yours.

And then there's a third form of assurance. Not only external, not only internal, but evidential, the evidence. And this is the great theme of John's epistle.

He was invading his first epistle against false professors. And that's what, that'll give you the clue to some of these rather extraordinary statements, where he emphasizes the necessity of there being evidence to such an extent that you almost feel shaken by how I got the evidence. He's trying to find out and bring to the cross the false professors.

But there is this evidence, and this is what Jesus is talking about, evidential. And if a branch is absolutely devoid of fruit, if he hasn't got a heart that is praising Jesus, love for him and love for other people, he may well wonder. And when on test, and when we're put on test, it may be we're counterfeited.

It's a domestic situation. And one partner talks to another. Hey, that doesn't sound like Jesus Christ talking.

Is Jesus Christ in him? But more alarming, he or she never repents. And by the way, repentance is one of the fruit, and he doesn't repent. The old Adam can rise, but as we heard last night, some of us are learning to repent.

That's fine. Maybe you say, well, it's pretty poor sort of life when you have to wait up to two o'clock. You don't have to wait up to two o'clock.

You needn't wait for any longer than you're humble enough to go to the cross, but sometimes we get stuck. But all I would say, if it takes you to two o'clock to repent between husband and wife, the consequent marital happiness is cheap at the price. The severe thing, the terrible thing when you don't, when you go to bed at ten and you're unaware.

She's got so used to you that she doesn't say, talk to me. You haven't for a long time, not deeply, and you become insensitive. Does that sound that Jesus Christ is in that person? Or perhaps another thing.

Here's someone who's engaging, we'll say, in illicit drinking, but hiding it, never confessing, never being open, no repentance. Does that sound as if Jesus Christ is in them? I wonder if they really are joined to the vine. Or again, an illicit relationship at various degrees with the opposite sex.

And this can happen on a branch that appears to be joined to the vine, but it's all hidden. It's covered up. And when it does come out, hearts are broken.

Does that sound like Jesus? Prove your own self. But this isn't the only thing. There's so many things.

And my dear friend, if you have any doubts, well, start again. There's no problem. The door of mercy is open.

I wonder if I am. Okay, then make sure today. Make your calling and election sure by coming to Jesus.

And this is my last word, and my hour didn't begin until we had the first hymn. I know he's mine. Jesus belongs potentially to the sinner, to the branch that has never been united or doubted.

But Jesus is the sinner's. That's what he came for, for sinners. And you, full of doubt, say, but he's mine.

He's offered me this sort of person. And you start with his blood. What I mean is this.

There are qualities in the Godhead that you can't say are yours. His power, his majesty, his glory. They're his, not yours.

But I tell you, there's one thing in the Godhead that is yours. The blood of Jesus. It's yours just because you are a sinner.

It was only shed, the sin, your sins. And if I can't lay claim to anything else in the Godhead, I can to the blood of Jesus. As the hymn says, oh believe it, oh receive it.

It is for thee. I don't care who that man is, how sensitive they are, how much they may condemn themselves. The blood of Jesus is yours.

That's what Jesus said when he said, eat the flesh and drink the blood, make it yours. It's yours. All that he did was for people no better than ourselves.

And if you have any doubts where you are, say, Lord, I'm receiving that blood. I know I'm not doing what I want to. Oh, there have been many things that have marred, but hallelujah, you anticipated them all on thy body, on the tree, and that blood is flowing for me.

I tell you again, I tell you, that's the one thing in the Godhead, in my lowest and darkest moments, is mine. The blood, I can appropriate it right on my level. And if the blood is yours, the one who shed it is yours.

And the riches of the one who shed it are yours. The vine is yours. And if there's any doubt in your mind, you better get it straight.

And it's so easy to do it. No problem. I don't mind if it shakes somebody's faith.

Oh, have I saved? I'm not. The blood's yours, brother. You don't ground your salvation on fruit, but on the blood of Jesus.

But the result of coming to him and saying, come in, Lord Jesus, into this life of mine, may your blood cleanse what I confess. Fruit follows. It's bound to.

Of course, it's true that other people can see the fruit better than you sometimes. It's Oswald Chambers who said, talked about conscious repentance leading to unconscious holiness. That's nice.

I don't like conscious holiness in a person, do you? Someone who's consciously holy. But oh, a man who's just a feeble branch, often having to come back and be cleansed afresh. Oh, there's holiness in that man.

He may not see it. He feels so feeble, but others see it. That's a gentleness, a sweetness.

You can get along with a brother like that. You can talk to him and he won't bite your head off. Ah, there's holiness.

And you know, it'd be my privilege again and again in this conference and among one's own circle of brothers in other parts to see holiness walking about on two legs. They don't know it, but I can see it. And I love them.

I can't see my holiness. I don't know where it is. But I've now got Jesus.

He's mine. And so here's the work of the vinedresser. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit and is proved to be counterfeit, unless it gets right, is ultimately taken away forever.

But he can get right. It's so easy to. He can find the blood that cleanses and the Jesus that saves.

And every branch that beareth fruit, he's intent on more fruit. And a loving hand may chasten us. It's a loving hand.

And the end is even greater peace, even greater joy, greater fruit. Let's sing that chorus then. I know he's mine.

You can all, we can all say it. If we choose to and believe it. The sinner can say, but best of all, I know he is mine.

Let's say the grace together. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

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