

Service and Servanthood of the Lord - Part 6 of 8

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the biblical concept of servanthood, emphasizing the roles of Jesus, Israel, and the church in fulfilling God's purpose for service and fruitfulness.

Duration: 1:06:45

Scripture: Isaiah 5:1-7, Isaiah 41:8, Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 53:11, Matthew 22:14, Revelation 2:4-5, Revelation 22:3-4

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the concept of service and the role of the servant in the Bible. The passages from Isaiah are examined to understand the model servant and the people called to be the corporate expression of that servant. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of discipline in the service of the Lord, using the analogy of a vineyard and the need for pruning and purging. The history of the Israelites is cited as an example of God's care and discipline over his chosen people.

Transcript

As quite a few of you have not been with us in the earlier gatherings of this conference, and also because it is very necessary that we all keep the main and full setting of what is being said before us, I will just take a minute or two by way of review or retrospect. We have been led at this time to be occupied with the matter of the servant and service of the Lord. Our basic fragment is from Isaiah, Behold my servant.

That particular phrase is of course prophetic and relates to the Lord Jesus. But what we have been seeing is that he is introduced in a very full way into the prophecies of Isaiah for a reason. In other passages concerning the servant, Israel is the object in view.

Israel, Jacob, my servant, that nation was chosen and constituted and dealt with by God with the specific object of being his servant among the nations and to the nations. For servanthood, that is, that in Israel there should be recovered and established and fulfilled the great law of service for which the universe was created to minister to God. Adam profited that trust, violated that law, and like the one who tempted and led him so to do, appropriated everything to himself to seek to make it minister to him.

So that, so far as God was concerned, this law of service was turned away and lost in the world and in the race. God therefore intervened to take out of the nations a people for his name, for his name to recover

this lost vocation, and for that he chose Israel. Then Israel failed and drew everything to itself for its own ends and interests.

And so the law of their life, which was laid down in Egypt, let my people go that they may serve me, was terribly violated and again the vocation was lost. When that was happening, the prophet Isaiah was raised up and the very heart of his prophecies is centered upon this coming servant in whom, without any fear of failure again, the divine principle and law of service would be perfected. Even in our Lord Jesus, who is introduced in a very full way in these prophecies as the one to whom attention is drawn, behold, my servant in whom my soul delighteth.

But that is not the end. Then there is a third aspect, because this servanthood is not intended to be isolated to an individual, although that individual may be God's own son. The eternal thought was a people, a race to fulfill that vocation.

When he has in preview, in forecast, accomplished all the meaning of this service in the person of his son, then he transfers that to a people. We have the third aspect of the prophecies in the remnant. A remnant shall retire.

And in that remnant, the Lord takes up again the values of this servanthood and says something that is very much akin to what he says about the servant, my peculiar treasure. Now, that is the Old Testament, but we know that there's the prophetic aspect. Even in the case of the servant, it was future.

The Lord Jesus, who took upon him the form of a servant, came at the time when the nation of Israel was set aside in that capacity, and accomplished this service himself, and brought in a nation to take the place of the nation that failed, a nation who would bring forth the fruit thereof. The church, the new holy nation, as Peter calls it. But before we are through the New Testament, we find that in general, that people is in a state of departure.

In the end, the last book in the first chapters, we find a people of God, but only nominally so, not actually and positively doing the thing for which the church was raised up. The Lord, as we know, came back on the old principle again, of a remnant, and appealed to such as would have an ear to hear, and make a response. And before him, the embodiment of this great service and servanthood principle and law, to minister to him and to his satisfaction.

The Bible closes with a view of such. His servant shall serve him. They shall see his face.

That briefly, then, is the review of what has been occupying us. We have been looking into that, or shall we say, at the great servant, with a view to understanding more perfectly what this service really means, the nature of it. The law of service as universal in the mind of God.

The nature and method of service in Christ and in a people for his name. Now, I think I will not go back over all the phases and aspects of that with which we have dealt. We will come this morning to one more of these, and I ask you just to look into the prophecies of Isaiah again, laying down our basic words in chapter 42.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth, I have put my spirit upon him. Then will you just look back at chapter 41, verse 8. But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend. Now, we see in those two passages, the model servant, and the people called to be, the corporate expression of that servanthood.

For our purpose this morning, a particular feature or aspect of this, I turn you back to chapter 5 of Isaiah. Let me sing for my well-beloved a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill, and he made a trench about it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein.

And he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. Now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? For when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes.

Now, go to, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up, and I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down, and I will lay it waste. It shall not be pruned, nor hoed, there shall come up briars and thorns.

I will also command the clouds that they will rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant land. And he looked for judgment, but behold oppression, for righteousness, but behold a cry.

Among the various similes of the servant of the Lord in these prophecies is this one of the vine. Israel, as the Lord's servant, is here conceived as a vine. And this is not an isolated passage in that connection.

It would take too long to read or even turn you to all of them. The national symbol of Israel was the vine. It was inscribed or wrought upon the very gates of Jerusalem, of the temple.

Psalms and psalm 80 said, Thou broughtest up a vine out of Egypt. Prophet Ezekiel in chapter 15 speaks about Israel as a vine. We know that the Lord Jesus himself on more than one occasion and in more than one way spoke of Israel as the vine.

And in his own matchless discourse, as probably he led his disciples by way of the temple, they saw the gate with the great vine upon it. He said, I am the true vine. A contrasting statement.

Come back to that again. But this and more shows us that Israel stood to the Lord in that capacity, the capacity of a vine. The Lord Jesus took that up and related it to himself to be to God, the Father, the husband man, all that the vine was intended to mean.

And then it is passed on to the church. It is passed on to the church. I am the vine, ye are the branches.

I think our subtle mentality very often thinks of that as two things. But what would a bare, mere stem be? You wouldn't call that a vine. The vine is everything.

Stem, branches, leaves, fruit, and everything else is one whole. So that the very idea, conception of the vine is transferred or carried into the church. Ye, ye.

Well, that is, as I have said, a conception of the servant of the Lord. Servant of the Lord as a vine. Whether it be Christ, whether it be Israel, whether it be the church.

And that is what we are going to look at more closely this morning. First of all, we note the place that it holds with God. There is no mistaking the fact that the Lord laid great store by this vine people.

I think that what he said about his son, his beloved, in whom he is so delighted, the committing of himself to him is only what he, the attitude that he wanted to take, the position that he wanted to hold in relation to his people. He really wanted to be able to say of Israel, and at one time he did, my beloved, in whom I so delight. It was a time when Israel was a delight to the Lord.

At any rate, the Lord had a lot of things like that to say about Israel. His heart, in a word, his heart was bound up with that people. I will sing to my well-beloved son of his vineyard.

It's the song or the language of endearment. Something very precious to the Lord. This vine servant was, as the word says, brought up out of Egypt.

All raised up from the seed of Abraham, my friend, was so chosen and constituted to be for God's pleasure, for God's pleasure, in which he should find his delight, in which he could take pleasure, and for God's satisfaction, he should find in it the answer to something that he longed for and desired. And still more, he should find by it his glory. It should be to his glory, just as any exemplary vine would be, the real satisfaction and pleasure and glory of the vine dresser, or of the owner of the vine.

That is the position that the vine holds with God. Something very precious to him, and very important to him, related to nothing less than his own glory, that in it and by it, his glory should be displayed. He should find his glory.

Well, that, of course, embraces a great deal of scripture. God's thoughts about his people. This is the very first meaning of servanthood, of ministering to the Lord.

It is to minister to his pleasure, to his satisfaction, and to his glory, to exist for that and for no other purpose. What God has in it, that is ministering. What God is to get through it, that is service.

And this all means that it has no other purpose in its existence. And it leads us to that as the second thing. Firstly, what it is to God, place that it holds to him, but then the place that it holds as to itself.

This, this is no casual illustration or symbolism. God is never casual in the choice of his objects, of teaching. He knows what he's doing.

And when he made the vine the symbol of ministry to himself and of real service to him, he knew exactly why he did so. Because, you see, the vine is exclusively, exclusively for fruitfulness. That is a thing that the prophet Ezekiel points out to the men around him.

You look at his prophecies in chapter 15, the thing that he is saying to them is this, there is no other use that you can make of a vine but its fruit. He even said this, can you even take of the stem of the vine and make a peg to hang anything on? You don't even do that. Someone has said you don't even make a washing pin or hook out of a vine.

Can't make anything of it. It is useless for all other or any other purpose than fruit. I say again, God knew what he meant when he took the vine as the symbol of the servant people.

And if that needs any kind of emphasis, underlining, you've only got to look at the servant. The servant who said I am the vine. Did he have any alternatives, any diversions, any secondary interests or uses? No.

He had so many things to which he could turn if one failed. He hadn't diversions in his life. He had nothing, nothing but this fruit bearing for the pleasure, satisfaction and glory of his father.

Exclusively bound to that one thing. That is the vine. That is the vine.

All its energies and all its interests are concentrated upon one thing. That is the Lord having what he wants. That upon which his heart is set.

The Lord having his inheritance. The Lord having his rights. His rights.

And all service that is really service to God is concentrated in that one thing. The Lord having his rights. Well we just say a word about those rights of God.

Have you quite, have you grasped this exclusiveness of purpose in existence? Have you got any alternatives? Have you got a second line of life? Have you got diversions? Is your life, though it has to be spread over many things, you have your home to look after, you have your business to go to and attend to? There are obligations in this world nevertheless. Have you got one motive in living, in doing all, whether it's home or business or anything else? One governing motive that gathers up everything and concentrates everything. The Lord having his rights.

The Lord finding his pleasure, satisfaction and glory. That is consecration. That is ministering to the Lord.

That is the service of the Lord. The service of the Lord has come to mean such a lot that very often is not the true principle of service. We talk about being servants of the Lord or going into the Lord's work or service.

We've got specific ideas, particular ideas about that. Well it may express itself in various and in many ways. But mark you, dear friends, the servant of the Lord is not some peculiar person wearing a certain kind of garb and going by a certain kind of title.

The servant of the Lord is any man, any woman put in any place who is there seeing to it that God gets what he can have there. And they're concentrated upon that. And you can be as much a servant of the Lord in your business, in your hospital, in your school, in your home as any man who ever stands behind this desk and preaches the word.

Just as truly it is the principle and motive and law of service that makes the servant, not the profession or anything else. The law of service is God has got to have everything wherever I am. So let this thought and truth transfigure everything for you.

You've got some difficult places to be in. Places that you would not choose if you had your way. Places to which you've got to go.

But take this with you. I'm going to be there. I'm going to be here as the servant of the Lord.

Men may think that I am or call me their servant. But I'm here as the servant of the Lord, whatever it is. And I have said that it is gathered up into this one idea that God has his rights.

The rights of God are found in the fruit. What are the rights of God? What is the fruit that is to come to him? Well, first of all, of course it has to do and must have to do with God's nature, finding its satisfaction. God has a peculiar constitutional liking for grapes.

It's only a way of saying something. His nature just delights in death. You know what I mean? We all have particular fancies, haven't we? Our natures go out for certain things.

That's a thing that we like, something in our constitution that just responds to that. We find that our very being gets a certain satisfaction, pleasure, gratification in certain things. Well, that's how it is with God in this matter.

His nature is to be satisfied by this fruit. But what is God's nature? What is God's nature? Well, Paul gives us the answer in his Galatian letter. Now the fruit of the Spirit is love.

God is love. And do you want to know what that is? Because the grammatical form demands that we put it like this. It does not say now the fruits of the Spirit are, and then the whole range of things.

It says just one, the fruit of the Spirit is love. What is that? Joy, long-suffering, meekness, goodness, self-control. That's love.

Along its various lines. But all those are aspects of the one thing, the nature of God. The love of God shed abroad in our hearts is the secret of joy.

It's the secret of joy. And it is the secret of long-suffering, that is, patience. It's the secret of everything else.

But all these things are expressive of the nature of God, and Paul says the fruit of the Spirit. And it is the secret of long-suffering, that is, patience. It's the secret of everything else.

But all these things are expressive of the nature of God, and Paul says the fruit of the Spirit is found in these things as manifestations of the one nature of God, love. He does look for that fruit. That fruit is God's right.

His nature demands that. His whole, may I say, constitution must have that for its satisfaction. It begins there in character, in nature, in the work of the Spirit in us, in the work of grace in us.

That is firstly the fruit to which God has a right. And it's inward, it's like that. The servant is essentially such a servant, whether it be the individual, or whether it be the church, or whether it be that which represents the church in the inner company.

The very service is in the first place the service of satisfying God as to his own nature. It is tragically and grievously true that so many find it possible to be in Christian work who are themselves a contradiction to the nature of God, persistently, persistently, habitually. And if there's one thing that the Bible thunders against, it is that that is one of the great consummate factors at the end of the Bible, those messages to the churches thunder out on this, this thing.

But there is that which is a contradiction to the nature of God. And how strong, how almost fierce is the voice of the Spirit where that is true. I have this against thee.

Thou hast there that woman, Jessica, them that teach the doctrine of Balaam, which thing I hate. Well, so contrary to the nature of God. And if we were to sum up the challenge to those churches, and to the church, and to ourselves, in a word we would say, when it's like that God is not getting his rights, he's not being ministered to in his very nature, the demands of his nature.

The beginning then of servanthood or ministry to the Lord is here in our character, in our character, in our answering to the nature of God, the Lord help us. But then when that is recognized, we've adjusted to that, this, these rights of God and this fruit for God is the satisfaction of God's position in this universe, in this world, in the nation. God's position.

See that was the whole charge laid against Israel, but we are not going to take that up now because it comes later. But God had been deposed from his right position. The Lord, the Lord was the only true and rightful Lord of this whole creation and of this people and of the nation.

Here, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God, is one God. He's lost that place, not only in the nation, but in his people. They were raised up particularly to bring God into his place in the nation as the only God, the true God.

His rights in creation, his rights in himself as the Lord were that he and he only should be served. Thou shalt love the Lord with all thine heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength, and him only shall the rights of God to exclusive and utter dominion, lordship, govern, center his rights. And that is the nature of servanthood.

Is it not clear in the case of the great servant, the Lord Jesus, what was he here for? Well, you may say he was here for this and for that, and there are many things which define his mission, but you put them all together, you put them all together, and they all meant one thing, God has got to have his rights. Rights in creation, rights in redemption, rights in dominion, rights in worship and in service. The great servant was committed and abandoned to that.

That is service, dear friends, that after having faced this question of satisfying God's nature, we are here, the church is here, or any company of the church is here on this earth for this purpose, to see to it that God has his place, which is utter. God is supreme. There is no dividing of allegiance with God.

God must have the fruit out of the nations and in the nations, and that's what the church is here for. We are here to be in the nations. Church is here to be in the nations that God should have his place in the nations.

Whatever challenge there may come to the presence of any people of God in any place, it is not how far they are successful in their service, it is a matter of their standing with both feet there and saying, here I am, I'm here for God, and my being here is a testimony to the fact that God has supreme rights in this place. I believe that that is exactly what the Lord Jesus meant when he said, this gospel of the kingdom, the rule of God must be preached as a witness in every nation. He did not say, this gospel of the kingdom must be preached and all the nations must be saved and everybody in the nations before the coming could take place.

He said, for a witness. A witness. There must be that in the nations which by its very presence witnesses to the fact that there's a break in the dominion of Satan.

It's not universal. We're here for that, dear friends. Where we are, there should be a testimony of the fact that Satan is not absolute, Lord.

Kingdom of Satan is not absolutely universal. Here's a break in it, and I am the break. My testimony.

That's why you're there, anywhere. I say again, it may not be that you'll have a lot of souls saved, or see a great deal of the result of your being there, but you're there. That's the fact.

God very often puts people just there. He doesn't explain along the lines of any proofs and evidences and pleasure and satisfaction, why they're there, but they're there, and that's all he wants, very often. Have us there, as a witness.

That's ministry. Very difficult ministry sometimes. He's pointed out yesterday, Isaiah was there, but the reactions to his presence were very painful for him.

There were no signs of any success of his ministry while he was giving it. Jeremiah was there, but he was there. The Lord had his men, and that's what mattered.

Not the success of their ministry, but the fact that they represented God's rights in the earth. And then, of course, God's rights are ultimately his fullness, his fullness, that he shall be filled with all things. And this is no contradiction of what I just said, not taking from it.

It may just be that, but nevertheless, nevertheless, this ministry, this service, is related to things coming back to the Lord. What we have before called a return movement to God. For that is everything taking place.

You see, in the beginning, everything was in God. And then things were taken out of God, taken away from God, diverted from God, and sent out in other directions for other ends, taken away from God. And this mighty movement of God through history has been to turn things back to himself.

A great return movement into God, so that at last, at last, as it is foreshown, he shall fill all things, and all things shall fill him. All things shall be summed up in him. He will be the sum of all things, when this great return movement has fulfilled itself.

Now, that is just the meaning of worship that so many of you know. And we are here for that purpose, to bring everything back to God, to counter that reverse, to break that course of things away from God. Oh, see how it's all being taken away from God.

That is the very principle of this world. Take everything for itself. Take everything for itself.

Church is here to bring everything back to him. When we speak about Christ filling all things, or the fullness of Christ, that is what we mean. It's his inheritance in the same, that he shall be the fullness of all things, turning things back to God.

Well, are you in that ministry? Are we in that servanthood? We here in this life and on this earth, for this one thing, God's going to have everything. It's going to be pulled back to him. We are going to stand right like a rock in this drift and this current that rushes away from God and turn it round and swing it back to him.

Challenge this thing. That's what the prophets did. That's what the Lord Jesus did, the great servant.

That is what the church is for. But isn't it sad, isn't it sad that the very church itself has become to some degree, not a small degree, that which has appropriated to itself for its own end and pleasure much that belongs to God. Yes, how many there are in the church and in what is called Christian work who are in it for their own satisfaction, for their own reputation, to make a name.

And if you interfere with them and their bit of work, you get into trouble. It's themselves after all in the work. Oh no, we are here not for ourselves.

We're here for God. Now I must hurry to the conclusion for this morning. And the third thing, as to the vine, we're keeping that of course well in the background of our mental conception picture.

The third thing is the discipline essential to this purpose. So much is said about this in relation to the vine, isn't it? The Lord himself spoke about it, every branch in me that beareth fruit, he parteth it that it may bear more fruit. We write from Isaiah, what more could be done to my vine than I have done.

A lot of history gathered into that where Israel is concerned, a tremendous amount of history, the history of discipline in that nation. What care God had taken, what application, what devotion, what labor, what pains over that vine. And the history of that people was not always a comfortable history under the hand of God.

The Lord didn't protect, safeguard, and so prevent difficulties arising and adversities. No, there's a lot crowded into the word discipline or purging, pruning if you like. Watch him, watch him, watch the husband man.

What is he doing? Well, he's cutting away a lot. That is, he is reducing things quite a bit. He is limiting certain liberties, limiting certain liberties.

He's taking away some liberties. There are liberties, you know, which are inimical to value. We rejoice in our liberty in Christ, but I'm afraid a lot of people misunderstood that liberty in Christ.

Years ago, I used to have a good deal of association with what is called modernists, the liberal school of theology. I knew them personally, many of them, and I found amongst them a real gloating over their position. Oh, what a great thing it is to be emancipated from that conservative, narrow school of biblical interpretation.

We no longer are bound by those old-fashioned ideas of the inspiration of the scripture and the deity of Christ and these things. We have escaped from those limitations. We rejoice in our liberty.

My question is the ultimate one. How much fruit for God has come along that line? How much satisfaction to God has that produced? The liberty of its kind, which is not fruitful in this way in which we are speaking, God having his rights, nay, to the contrary. The kind of liberty, although it is not the liberty of Christ.

I remember not so long ago going to Denmark, finding they were in the vortex of a great difficulty. A whole group of their once most promising young men had misinterpreted or misapprehended the teaching of Galatians about liberty in Christ and thrown out all restraint. We in Christ are free from all law.

We are free from the law. Therefore, there is no law against our smoking. We can smoke.

There is no law against our going to the theater. We can go. We are free in Christ.

Thrown out of all those restraints on this misinterpretation of liberty. It was disastrous to the spiritual life. Very glad to say that that battle was fought through and cleared up and that's all right now and they're all in the right time of liberty, which, of course, means the restriction of certain things.

The difference, as we so often say, between liberty and license is another form of liberty, which equally is not a fruitful liberty. You know, the Roman church has a liberty. Oh, it's this liberty of taking away your own

conscience and making the church and the priest your conscience.

I need not have any conscience about things at all. My priest will look after that for me. My church will look after that for me.

And so very often you find a terrible contradiction in that system. Terrible contradiction where suddenly things are not to the satisfaction of God. But how they glory in that kind of liberty, don't they? Oh, how good it is to be free from what they mean is conscience.

They call it law. They call it narrowness, but what they mean is conscience about this and that. You're free.

That's taken over by a system. It doesn't always work out very fruitfully. You get that sort of thing in the army.

When a man goes into the army, the government and the army take over all responsibility for him. He has no longer any personal responsibilities except to do from day to day what he's told. Everything else taken over for him and he doesn't worry a bit.

He doesn't worry whether his family is looked after or anything like that. It's all taken off of him. Beautiful liberty, but what about character? What about character? What about the building up of personal responsibility? That doesn't come into it.

It's a liberty that is inimical to real values. And when those men come out of the army, if they've been in long enough, they don't know what to do. Now they've got to take the whole thing on their own shoulders and they're not fit for it.

They have become unqualified to face life for themselves and many of them want to get back into the army again simply because of this matter of responsibility. You see what I mean? Well, there's a discipline about fruitfulness that is absolutely essential and that discipline is sometimes the removal of certain liberties, the cutting down, if you like, a certain kind of narrowing. God forbid that we should be narrow.

I don't see how anybody can be narrow and have a right conception of the eternal, universal, vast realities of Christ and his Church. It can't be narrow when you've got real apprehension of these vast things into which we are called. The greatness of Christ, the greatness of the Church, that's not narrow.

But there is in this the necessity for shutting us up to the things which matter most and they are fruit, fruit, fruit for God. So we find in this process of discipline there is with the Lord an intensification. That's it.

That's it. He purges it, not that which is bearing no fruit, for God's bare fruit. Yes, there's fruit.

It isn't that there is no fruit at all, but that there is fruit is not always what he is most set upon. It is not bulk, it is not measure, it is quality, it is weight that matters with God. It is what is intrinsic value.

So when there is fruit he purges that it may bear more fruit, that is less for better. Very often, less for better. Not spread over too wide an area in order to get something more concentric or more intensive, more rich, more full, more intensive.

That is a principle with God in his dealings with the vine. Then there is no figure, I think, that sets forth the principle of the corporate better and more than the vine. Here indeed, and the suggestion is ludicrous, here indeed one grape cannot exist by itself.

Well, go into a vinery, and what would you say if you saw up there one grape, and over there another grape, and over there one more grape? You would say, well, there's something gone wrong here. This is either subnormal or abnormal. This is not the normal life.

What is the normal life? A bunch of grapes. A bunch of grapes, closely in touch, in contact, related to each other. It is a corporate life, isn't it? And I say again, I think there is no figure that better and more fully sets forth this corporate principle of service.

Really, really, God gets most of his satisfaction through the relatedness of his church and service. You try to be an individual grape, well, you may be. You may be a grape, and you might even be a very large one, and there's something abnormal about that.

It's not natural. It's not right. The Lord gets far more by fellowship, by relatedness, by oneness, by being together, far more.

He's laid down that principle. He's laid down that principle. Two or three, you see, the corporate principle, that's his line.

He's always worked on that. And get scattered, get divided, and there's something lost, something lost. This very service, dear friends, to God requires that we are closely together.

We're really bound together. That we are, in a sense, one fruit. One bunch.

I just say that because it's a very important thing to notice. And finally, the intrinsic element of this symbol, the vine, surely is life. It is life, isn't it? We know how, in the word, word, the fruit of the vine, fruit of the vine, is the symbol of the blood of Christ, the very blood of Christ.

As he takes the cup and the wine, he says, this is my blood, my blood shed for you. Two things go together, fruit of the vine and the blood in symbolism. And what is the blood but the life, the very life.

So that the intrinsic element and factor in the fruit is that it ministers life. Life is being ministered. Life is being ministered.

There's a virtue. There's an energy. It is that of life.

I think everything has got to be tested by that, don't you? Because that's the ultimate thing. So what is ministry? What is fruitfulness? What is service and servanthood? Well, it resolves itself into this at the end. How much life you're ministering.

How much life others are coming into and deriving by your being there where you are. Not how much truth, not even how much light, but how much life when they come. One thing that they do sense, whether they understand everything or not, is life.

Life, there's life. That's the fruit. That's the real meaning of the vine.

But mark you, mark you, the fruit of the vine, the wine comes out of the wine press, the wine press, perhaps you know what that means. Yes, the derived values of this service come out of suffering, out of pressure, out of grinding and crushing and breaking and squeezing. We know what that means to some extent in spiritual terms like that.

But remember that it's, that is the way of being able to give, to give. This is fruit for giving, not for keeping, for holding. It's for giving, to be able to give.

That's service, to have something to give for the life of others. That is servanthood. Well, so much then the Lord write it deep in our hearts.

He brought a vine out of Egypt. I am the vine, you're the branches.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/0/SID0096.mp3>

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