

# The Heavenly Calling - Part 15

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The true vine, Jesus Christ, has a nature to reach out to all men, and his church must fulfill its mission to all nations, even if it means suffering and breaking.*

**Duration:** 55:52

**Scripture:** Psalm 80:8, Isaiah 5:1-2, Jeremiah 2:21, Jeremiah 6:9, Ezekiel 15:2, Matthew 6:33, John 15:1

**Topics:** "Heavenly Calling"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by asking a rhetorical question about the usefulness of a vine branch from the forest. He emphasizes that the branch is only fit for fuel and cannot be used for any productive work. The preacher then transitions to the topic of the true vine, which is Jesus Christ. He explains that Jesus replaces the false vine, symbolizing Israel's failure to fulfill its purpose. The preacher references Psalm 80 and Ezekiel 15 to support his message, highlighting the biblical imagery of God bringing a vine out of Egypt and questioning the significance of the vine tree.

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## Transcript

The Gospel by John, chapter 15. We have been seeing that there are two books in the New Testament which are wholly occupied with a special matter. And that is the transition from the Old Jerusalem to the New Jerusalem.

From the Old Israel to the New Israel. The Old being left behind. The New coming into view.

But the New being constituted upon the spiritual principles of the Old. The two books referred to are the Gospel by John and the Letter to the Hebrews. We have said that in the Gospel by John there are 16 steps in this transition.

And I'm afraid I have made a mistake over that. But I have discovered some more today. But I'm not going to include them.

I'm not sure that we shall be able to take number 16. But however, we will come to number 15 tonight. And the 15th step in this transition is here in the 15th chapter of the Gospel by John.

I am the true vine and my father is the husband man. The rest of the chapter is well known to you. And I shall not read it all through.

But shall refer to it later. Before we go on we must get to our Old Testament. First of all in the book of the Psalms.

Psalms 80. Verse 8. Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt. Thou didst drive out the nations and planted it.

Verse 14. Turn again, we beseech thee, O God of hosts. Look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine.

Look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine. Chapter 5. 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.

Prophecies of Jeremiah. Chapter 2. Verse 21. Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a ripe seed.

How then art thou turned into the dangerous plant of a strange vine unto me. Chapter 6. Verse 9. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, they shall truly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine. Turn again thine hand as a great gatherer into the baskets.

Prophecies of Ezekiel. Chapter 15. And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is the vine tree more than any tree? The vine branch which is among the trees of the forest.

Shall wood be taken thereof to make any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel. The fire hath devoured both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. It is profitable.

Is it profitable for anyone? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel. The fire hath devoured both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Behold, when it is unburnt, it is profitable for no one.

The vine branch which is among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Well, there you have the old Israel background. What Israel was intended to be, what Israel failed to be.

And the destiny of that Israel cast into the fire. It is clear from these scriptures that Israel was called God's vine. But that vine became a false vine.

And God had to cast it into the fire. And God had to cast it into the fire. But also God brought forth a new one.

The names of Israel have been taken over into the new Israel. Here in this chapter, the vine is taken over. When Jesus said, I am the true vine, he emphasized that word true.

If you could hear him saying it, you would hear him saying it like this, I am the true vine. The implication is perfectly clear. I take the place of the false vine.

The false vine has been cast away. I am the true vine which takes its place. We have to see for a little while how Israel was false to its very nature and purpose.

What is the nature of a vine? It is the nature of a vine to spread out far and wide. We have at least two vines in England and Scotland which are as long as this room. They have thus spread out on the right and

on the left.

They are always reaching out to cover more space. It is not the nature of the vine just to go straight up. It is its nature to reach out, that is the nature of the vine, to expand itself.

Israel was raised up for this very purpose, to stretch out their arms to embrace the nation. I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles is the word. The nation shall come to thy light.

And kings to the shining of thy brightness. Israel was just raised up of God to be a testimony in all the nations. To bring to the whole world the knowledge of God.

It was Israel's calling to fulfill a world purpose and a world vision. Israel was intended to be God's missionary nation to the whole world. But instead of embracing the nations they excluded the nations.

They drew a wall round themselves and they said we are the people and all others are dogs. They called the Gentiles dogs. They shut themselves in to themselves.

They became an exclusive people and thus they contradicted their own nature and their own mission. Exclusiveness was a contradiction to the very nature of Israel. And exclusiveness is always a contradiction to divine nature.

Because it is not written in scripture God so loved the Jewish nation that he gave his only begotten son. It is written God so loved the world. The very love of God was contradicted by their exclusiveness.

The very nature of God amongst them was violated in that way. To turn in upon themselves or upon ourselves is always a violation of divine calling. For any people or any person to make themselves an end in themselves is a sin.

That is why in the order of nature when nature is normal a family expands. The Lord laid down this law right at the beginning of human history. He said to Adam and Eve be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.

It was in the very nature of things by the appointment of God. And I say when things are normal no lives are an end in themselves. Of course I know of those exceptions where it is not possible to do this.

But I am speaking of the normal course. In the very nature of things normally God intends life to be an expanding life. And anybody who deliberately violates that law will be an end in themselves and will sin against God's law.

Now Israel was called to expand and to fill the earth with the knowledge of the law. Israel withheld that from the nations, turned in on themselves, made themselves an end in themselves. God came down upon that and said alright you shall be an end in yourselves.

God's judgments are usually the confirmation of our own choices. But that was Israel's nature and that was Israel's violation of its nature as a bind. Instead of expanding to the world it contracted into itself.

Anything like that is always fatal. Well that was the nature. What about the purpose? Well quite obviously the purpose of a bind is to bear fruit.

It is to bear grapes. And from the grapes there is to come the wine. You know that in the Old Testament wine is always the symbol of life.

It means life. That is why we have it at the Lord's table. It represents his blood and in his blood is life.

He himself called it the fruit of the vine. He did not say I will not drink of my blood again with you until I drink it in the kingdom of heaven. He said I will not drink of the fruit of the vine with you again until I drink it in the kingdom.

The grapes and the wine are symbols of life. Israel of old was called to minister the life of God to all the nations. When you read these gospels and you look to see what kind of fruit it is that that Israel is bearing.

It is anything but life. It is really death. It is sour fruit.

All those who were tasting the fruit of that Israel were turning away and saying we don't want anymore. This is not life, this is death. The gospels are just full of that truth.

Jesus said I am the true vine. In him was life. And the life was the life of men.

Men's faces grew light when they tasted of him. Now did you notice one thing that we read from the old testament about the vine? Those verses in Ezekiel 15. There we read that the vine has no other purpose in its existence but to bear fruit.

Have you ever seen anything made out of vine? You have never seen a table made of the vine? You have never seen any vessel made of a vine? You have not even seen a walking stick made of a vine? You can do nothing with a vine? That is what Ezekiel said. Men will not even take of it a peg to hang something on. It is absolutely useless apart from fruit.

The only purpose of its existence is the grapes. And if it does not bear the grapes you just put it in the fire says Ezekiel. There are no byproducts of the vine.

There is no secondary use for the vine. It exists for one thing and one thing only. And that is truth.

And that is what God raised up the old Israel for. To bear his divine fruit of life and light for the nation. Israel failed to do that.

God has no other use for an Israel like that. And so he says cast it into the fire. And he cast it into the fire these nearly 20 centuries ago.

And that is where it is. And from that we can see what the Lord Jesus means by being the true vine and we being the branches. The true vine is that which fulfills the one and only purpose of its existence.

So Jesus brings this illustration over to himself and his church. And it is perfectly clear what the nature of the Lord Jesus is. His nature is reaching out to all men.

Embracing the whole world. He takes into his heart all the nations. All men are his concern.

Not any one nation. But all the nations. To his apostles he said going to all the world.

Preach the gospel to every nation. It is the very nature of Jesus to do that. It is quite foreign to the nature of Jesus to be exclusive.

To be small and narrow and self-occupied. Our salvation is to have our hearts enlarged bigger than ourselves. Anybody who turns in on himself or herself and is always occupied with themselves is dying while they live.

It cannot be avoided. Let a little company of the Lord's people just live to themselves. Become wholly occupied with themselves.

And their days are numbered. They are living a living death. Their destiny is to fade out.

That is true of any one Christian or of any company of the Lord's people. Because Christ is in the believer. And his very nature is to reach out like the vine.

He would draw all men unto himself. And to be otherwise is to be a contradiction to the very nature of Christ. This is the nature of the true vine.

And Jesus says I am the vine and you are the branches. And the branches and the vine make one vine. They partake of the same nature.

And do you notice it is the very branches themselves who do the expanding work of Jesus. Yes it is by the branches that this expanding nature is manifested. Do you notice that that is what happened in Jerusalem right at the beginning.

Some trouble sprang up in the church, the Christian church in Jerusalem right at the beginning. It was the first bit of trouble that the Christian church had. Some of the first apostles wanted to stay in Jerusalem.

They wanted to build up this church in Jerusalem. They were forgetting the commandment of the Lord. And they were just settling down in Jerusalem.

To make Jerusalem the center of everything. And to make Jerusalem an exclusive body. Then there rose up in their midst a young man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

That young man's name was Stephen. If you listen to what Stephen said you will hear him saying this will not do. We have been called for the nations.

We are not to be an exclusive people. We are called to a world mission. We must not settle down again in the old Judaism.

Some of the first Christians and Christian leaders did not agree with him. Of course the oldest row did not agree with that. And so they stoned Stephen on this very issue.

They stoned Stephen on the issue of the world mission of the church. I cannot help asking the question where was James and where was Peter when Stephen was being stoned? They were in Jerusalem but they were not there. Why was it that Stephen was stoned and not Peter and James? Because at that time Peter and James were not taking the line that Stephen was taking.

They were making Jerusalem everything. But of course the old Israel won't stone them if they do that. So somewhere in Jerusalem they are quite safe.

But Stephen was stoned for this very thing. Do understand dear friends that there is something here to be taken note of. And it is this that we must take note of.

That this new Israel is given a mission to all the nations. And there is a great price to pay for that mission. The whole kingdom of Satan is against that.

If you will just become a little quiet compromising local sect you will be alright. Just living within your own walls and closed doors the devil won't worry you. And the world won't trouble its head about you.

It will leave you alone. But if you go out on this heavenly level of things to embrace all men in Christ. You will find the world is against you.

You will find the devil is against you. And you and I ought to see this in our day as no one has ever seen it before. Do you not see what is happening in the nations? There is not a missionary left in China.

And it is no longer possible for a missionary to go into China. And in large parts of the world that same thing is happening. They have tried to drive them out of Africa.

Why is this? Oh the kingdom of Satan does not want Jesus to get into his world. There have been literally some millions of martyrs in China for Jesus Christ. And many others in Africa and in other parts.

It was never quite like this before. This is a new phase of things. Satan knows that his time is short.

And he must do all that he can to close the nations to Jesus Christ. And there is a great price bound up with this world mission. Stephen is the great example of that.

The purpose then of Christ and his church, of the vine and the branches, is to bring life to men all over this world. I wonder if that is true, altogether true of the church today. Don't you think that even the Christian church today is failing in that matter? It is not really bringing life to the nations.

Many, many a place called a church is not bringing life even to its own little village. This is a contradiction of Christ. But it is quite very well to think of this objectively.

This has got to come down to every one of us. What is the proof that Christ is in you and in me? How can it be known that Christ is in us? Only in one way. That others are receiving life through us.

That we minister life to others. The life of Christ. That when hungry and needy people come into touch with us, they feel the touch of life.

They may express it in different ways. But it amounts to this. That man, that woman has got something that I have not got.

He or she has something that I need. I feel it about them. There is something about them that I feel.

And it is what I really need. That should be true of every Christian. Because Christ who is the true vine is in us.

Expanding himself through us. And ministering his life through us. Oh do pray dear friends.

Every day that you get up, pray. Lord make me a channel of life to someone today. Lord minister your own life through me to someone today.

May I bring life wherever I am. The Lord has no other purpose for you and for me. We may try to do a lot of things.

But if we belong to the vine, we are no good for anything but to bear fruit. That is to bring life to others. Yes, fruit only fruit.

Not even to be a peg upon which to hang something. Not even to be a walking stick to help somebody to stand up straight. No, God has no use for us but to bear fruit.

To bring life. Now Jesus said here in this chapter. If a branch bring forth fruit.

My father the husband man pruneth it that it may bring forth more fruit. Of course we understand that in nature and we agree with it. Perhaps if you have had anything to do with great vines, it's what you have done.

Strange that we believe in it as a law of nature and say it's the right thing to do. And it's the best thing to do. To cut this piece off so that it will do better.

But we don't agree with the Lord doing it to us. When the Lord begins to do that with us, we are full of grumbles and complaints. When the Lord for a little while calls us to do less.

In order that he might fit us to do more. They don't agree. When it seems that the Lord is taking away some of our fruit.

Taking away some of our work. We are full of problems. We don't understand the Lord.

And we begin to ask questions about his love. Now Jesus has laid it down as a positive truth. Here is some branch that is bearing fruit.

It is not a branch that is bearing no fruit. He says he cast that into the fire. But it is the fruit bearing branch that he proves.

Here is the branch that is fulfilling it's vocation. And the Lord looks at it. He says that's very good.

I'm very pleased with that. But I can do better than that. There is better that that branch can do.

So he takes the knife. And he disciplines us. He reduces us in order to increase us.

He cuts away some in order that there might be more. What a lot of history there is in that statement. The writer of our letter to the Hebrews said.

No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous. But afterward it beareth the peaceable fruit of righteousness. That is only saying that the husband man does sometimes take the knife.

And he cuts deeply into our souls. But afterward there is more and there is better fruit than there was before. Time is gone.

It just brings me to this last word. The wine comes from the grape through the winepress. The winepress is the symbol of pressure.

What pressure is brought up to bear upon that fruit in order to get the wine. The winepress is the symbol of breaking. That fruit is broken to pieces.

And out of that fruit is run by agony the wine. When Jesus said I am the true vine. It is prophesied of him that he would tread the winepress alone.

The cross was the winepress of the Lord Jesus. The cross was the winepress of the Lord Jesus. He was crushed.

He was broken. But out of that breaking has come the life which you and I have. And which so many in all the nations ever since have received.

And in a measure that is true of his church. It was out of the crushing and the breaking of the church that the life came to the world. And dear friends that is true of every member, every branch of the church.

If we are to fulfill this true living ministry. It will only be through suffering. It will be through the winepress.

It will be pressure and breaking. Paul said we were pressed out of measure. Always beyond our enduring.

But what life has come out of that man's pressure. It is like that. I am not talking about preaching and bible teaching.

There is a great deal of that which is not life. But I am talking about this great ministry of Christ giving his life through us. It may be through preaching.

It may be through teaching. It may be through living. But if it is his life it will come out of experiences of suffering.

A preacher or a teacher who has never suffered, never ministered life. Well this may not seem a very pleasant outlook. But it is true.

The best doctors and nurses are those who know something about suffering themselves. I would always choose a doctor who knew something about sickness in himself. I have had many doctors.

And I have had many nurses. And I know the difference. Some are just professional.

Treating you as a case. You are just number so and so. But there are others.

Who treat you as a person. As a human being. Who care for you.

And if you ask why. They have got a background of suffering themselves. They know just a little of what you are going through.

We read this morning from Hebrews. We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. But was tempted in all points like as we are.

He is able therefore to succor those who are tempted. He has been the way of the wine press. We have received the benefit.

Is this why Paul said that I may know him and the fellowship of his suffering? Paul knew quite well that the sufferings of Christ meant life. And if there was one thing that Paul wanted for others it was that they should have this life. And if there was one thing that Paul wanted for others it was that they should have this life.

And that they should have it through him. So he said that I may know the fellowship of his suffering. That may not be our ambition.

We may not like the idea very much. But may the Lord help us to look at things in this way. The Lord is putting me in the wine press.

He is putting me through a time of great pressure. I am being broken. And crushed.

The Lord intends more fruit. More life. More people to have the life.

For the very nature of this being is to reach out to others. That is the true vine. Anything that is not like that is the false vine.

I am the vine, ye are the branches.

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