

The Final Days of Jesus
CONNECTED TO THE SON

Wednesday, March 18

Reading: John 15:1-11

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."*

As Jesus and His disciples walk the moonlit streets of Jerusalem heading for Gethsemane, perhaps they passed a vineyard, which were plentiful in Israel. A golden vine had also been engraved on the Temple gate. The prophets often pictured the Jewish nation as a vine or vineyard (see Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15; Hosea 10:1). While Israel was a fruitless vine, Christ pictures Himself as the True Vine with God the Father pictured as the farmer who cares for the vine. And those who claim to follow Christ are the branches.

Jesus states there is one thing that is true of all genuine believers: they will BEAR FRUIT. While some believers may have more fruit than others, there is no such thing as a fruitless believer. What makes a Christian fruitful?

(1) PRUNING (15:1-3) is discipline and trials that prepare us to be more fruitful.

(2) The POWER (15:4-6) comes from Jesus Christ. Just as the branches need nourishment from the vine to grow, so believers must stay connected to Christ so His power flows through them.

(3) The PURPOSE (15:7-8) of our prayers should always be tied to doing God's work and growing to be like Christ. We prove that we belong to Christ when we stay connected to Him and obey His words. Then our desires will be His desires. We remain in Christ's love and receive His joy when we obey what He has told us (15:9-11).

LESSON ONE: "Branch That is Thrown Away and Withers." Jesus is talking about two different groups here. The fruitful branches are true believers. The unfruitful branches that are thrown away and burned are those who, while they appear to be connected to the Vine, they are not receiving the life-giving nourishment from the Vine. These branches are removed by the Father and cast out as worthless. This proves they were never true believers since Jesus promised "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37 NKJV). There will always be true and false believers in the church. In other places, Jesus calls them the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) and the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). These unbelievers in the church may fool people. They may even fool themselves. But they are NOT fooling God. They are like Judas who looked like a loyal follower but never gave his heart to the Lord. This is a good warning! Are you connected to Jesus Christ through a personal relationship or are you just going through the motions? Are you a real branch that is bearing fruit for the kingdom?

LESSON TWO: "Branch That Does Bear Fruit He Prunes." We usually think that troubles and trials mean that something is wrong in our walk with Christ. But Jesus says the purpose of the Father's pruning is to get us ready to be even more productive. The Lord's discipline is proof that we are His children (Hebrews 4:12). Discipline and trials build our character and faith. God uses His Word as a pruning knife to cleanse our hearts (Hebrews 4:12) and He uses trials to drive us to His Word (Psalm 119:67, 71). How do you approach the trials and discipline of the Lord in your life? Do you see it as a hammer to knock you down or as a ladder to raise you up and make you stronger and more fruitful?