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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 5 January 1919

JOHN 15 v 1 and 2

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit".

There is a vine in the Scriptures which is called an empty vine, not because it has no fruit, but because it bringeth forth fruit unto itself. Israel is an empty vine; he beareth fruit unto himself; that is, he was precisely contrary to the Apostle's direction - Whether we eat or whether we drink or whatsoever we do, we are to do unto the glory of God, while Israel did what he did unto himself. A searching word this, one calculated to bring honest people to a solemn question with respect to themselves. To whom do they bear fruit? Christ here declares the contrary of Himself to that - "I am the true vine". The root of the vine is the foundation and the source of all fruit. From it come the trunk and all the branches, and when the fruit hangs on the vine, the praise is due to the root, whence that fruit has come. When a child of God is filled with the fruit of righteousness, then he knows what Paul teaches to be true - which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God. You, if you have fruits of grace, they come from Christ. This text teaches us some very solemn truths which I would, by the help of the Lord, direct your attention to. It teaches us, in the first place, that without union to the Lord Jesus, there is nothing but barrenness belonging to us, that is to say, death. This let me speak of for a minute. O my friends, if you have no union to the Lord Jesus, whatever else you have is death. Severed from God, we all are by sin. "In the day that thou eatest thereof", that is of the forbidden fruit, "thou shalt surely die". Sinner, that is your case now, "dead in trespasses and sins". You have no union with God except the union of a rebellious subject to a just and lawful sovereign, who will not do iniquity. O consider this, you who fear not God, and may you be brought to kiss

the Son lest He be angry and ye perish from the way. There is a truth in this text which is wonderful and beautiful, namely, that there subsists an intimate union between Christ and His people. "I am the vine; ye are the branches". This union is of sovereign grace, electing love, invincible power. It took place in the council of peace in the Trinity. It takes place in the new birth. It becomes an experience when Christ is revealed and the soul is sensibly united to Him, and these points are of such importance that I would speak a little of them. Union with Christ is in the purpose of God. Union with Christ took place in regeneration. Union with Christ becomes a sacred feeling in the soul when Christ and the soul meet together and faith embraces and receives Him. Without this union there is nothing but condemnation for us. Hence, everyone instructed by the Holy Ghost desires union, and his prayer is expressed for him in the language of Watts:

O let a lasting union join
My soul to Christ, the living vine

This union is very intimate. This union expresses also dependence. It is intimate. Look at the branch, see its union and look at it as it receives its life as a branch; its life, its bud, its grape from the root. All this expresses intimacy. There is an intimacy between Christ and His children. There is a receiving of life from Christ as there is a receiving of the sap as it rises from the root and into the branch to make it a fruitful branch. The beauty of the vine is in the root. "What", asks the Lord by Ezekiel, "what is the vine more than any other tree? What is the wood of it?" The most unprofitable wood. "Who would take so much as a pin to hang anything thereon?" asks the Lord. If you look at the sacred humanity of Christ, apart from His eternal Deity, there is no virtue, no good to any man. Whatever He might have been as a mere Man, it would have been for Himself and not for another. And what is the branch, as a piece of wood? Uncomely looking, dry looking, and of no value. But when the root comes to be considered, with all its virtue and fatness, sending its sap, its living sap into the vine, then O what richness, what beauty, what intimacy, there is and the people of God are brought to this. There is intimacy in this blessed union between the root and the branch. "I am the true vine". This intimacy is known to every believing soul at

times. When faith is in exercise; when prayer becomes effectual through the moving and intercession of the Holy Spirit; when you cast a lost soul on Christ; when you can come to Him with a body of sin and death that burdens and plagues, that often besets and overcomes you as it did in the Apostle Paul's case; when you can bring your troubles, your necessities, unto God in Christ; when, doing so, you draw virtue, grace, grace to bear the unequal strife, grace to take up your cross, grace to submit to the will of God, grace to feel His blessed fear, grace to cast on Him all your care, grace to feel there is nothing due from you but thankfulness and dependence upon the Lord; that, that is receiving of sap from that living, rich root. And this, dear friends, is the life of religion. This is the very soul and essence, quintessence of godliness. Looking at what is religion, see then this point first of all. Dwell upon it, look into it as you are enabled, and see if God has given you union with Jesus Christ. It may not be with you that you can say that you have had any distinct manifestations of Christ to your souls, some of you, but O if you can say - I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from my fear; if you can say, "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his troubles"; if you can say that from the guilt of sin, from the power of sin, from the committing of sin, you have been delivered in some measure at times, by Jesus Christ; then you can say truly at least it is the case with you, you have union with this blessed vine, this true vine. The fruit always answers to the state of the root. If the root be good, what fruit is born is of the nature of the root, and when you receive from Christ, you receive according to His grace and love, and what you bear is like Himself. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God. The fruit of grace is holiness, holiness unto the Lord. Not that namby pamby goodness of the flesh, which is so easy, but that resistance of sin, that hatred of sin, that abhorrence, that repentance, that humility, that lying low in the dust of self-abasement and nothingness felt before the Lord. That is the fruit of grace; that glorifies God. Every deliverance you get from the power of sin, every lively hope you have of being delivered from the guilt of sin, you will find eventually come from Jesus Christ, nowhere else.

O let a lasting union join
My soul to Christ the living vine

"Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples". Mind the fruit, look at the fruit, my friends. What is the fruit? He who thinks himself freed from sin and is without conflict with sin, and has no resistance to sin in his spirit, no sorrow for sin in his mind, no repentance of sin before God, is deceived. But he who often complains, it may be of his ignorance of Christ, his distance from Christ, and the much working of sin, and the prevalence of sin again and again; who painfully feels his lacks, and owns them before God and wishes he were a Christian, but thinks he is not, wishes he were right but fears he is not, that man has some evidence; not to his comfort, but he has some real evidence of union which shall increase into this - he shall find himself filled with the fruits of righteousness, with peace, peace with God which passeth all understanding. This blessed union shall never be dissolved. But there is, in the second verse, a word that is very solemn and may be very trying to some of you. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". Every branch that beareth not fruit in Me He taketh away. How can a person who is to be taken away and cast into the fire and burned, be said to be in Christ? In this gospel we read of disciples, scholars, being offended with the teaching of their Master, Christ, and the result was, they forsook Him. They went back, went to another school, went to the world and never went to Christ's school again. From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. They walked with Him for a time, went with Him, went after Him, were apparently disciples, spoke of Him. Perhaps they praised Him, perhaps they united with others in singing to Him, but when His teaching displeased their hearts they went away, they went back and walked no more with Him, never listened to Him again, and yet they were disciples. Temporary believers, historical believers there may be in this chapel, believers in Christ, and perhaps if anyone spoke against Christ in your hearing it would offend you and pain you. O, but in your hearts what is there? Is there prayer, is there faith, is there a looking to Christ? Is there a waiting on Him, a longing to know Him? Does the cry go out - "O be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down to the pit". If you are convicted that there is not, what then? If there is never manifested in you a union with Christ, so intimate and so effectual as to bring forth real fruit, then what you have you will lose. "From him that hath not shall be taken away even

that which he hath". From him that hath not the root bearing him, that hath not union with the root, his very profession shall be taken away. It shall wither as a branch and shall be gathered of men and burned. This taking away is very solemn; let me draw your attention to it for a minute or two. Shall be taken away. "He taketh away". God does it. Some providences do it as the instrument. Some teaching does it as the instrument, as Christ's teaching in the case I have just alluded to did it. He took them away. His judgment came on them. They were not His disciples, so He took them away in judgment. And now, what providences may take men away. Look in the book of Revelations and see the golden rod given to the servant of God to measure with. What was he to measure? The temple, the altar, and the worshippers thereat. What was he not to measure? Many religious people, called the outer court. Measure it not; it is given to the Gentiles, given to be trodden under foot of the Gentiles; taken away, separated from the true worshippers. Who are the true worshippers at the altar? Men of whom the Apostle speaks in the Hebrews. "We have an altar". "Therefore", says he, "let us go forth unto Him", unto Christ, "without the camp bearing His reproach". That altar which we have is Christ. To go forth unto Christ is to go out of self, out of your own wisdom, your own goodness, your own strength. To go to Christ for grace and wisdom, for life and pardon and justification and sanctification. You say, I have them not. I say, if you have union you go for them. That is the point here for the moment for us to notice. If you have union with Christ you go to Him for those things. He has them to give. As the root has virtue to give to the branches, so Christ has pardon and sanctification to give to the guilty and the polluted. He takes away, by His blood, the guilt of sin. He takes away, by His grace, the dominion of sin. He is of sin the double cure, and His people seek it. But all who are taken away lack this; they lack it. "Every branch that beareth not fruit in Me He taketh it away". "My Father is the husbandman." This places the soul under the care of the Father, as the husbandman has care of the vine and he sees the fruitless branch. He sees the trailing branch; he sees it dragging on the ground and he cuts it away because it bears no fruit. And God sees these fruitless branches, sees how, that whatever they have in religion, they have of themselves, and there is no prayer, no faith, no hope, no love, no cleaving to Christ, no want of Him, no begging of Him to save from the power and the guilt of sin, and so He

takes them away. What a solemn thing it will be to be taken away. Born in religion, brought up in religion, liking religion, but have no grace; these taken away. Having no life, they are taken away as dead things.

My Father is the husbandman, and so every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit. What a beautiful thing, but what a troublesome thing, troublesome, that is to say, to nature. Let us look at this bearing fruit, Every branch that beareth fruit, every branch that has faith, faith in the bleeding Lamb. What does faith do in the heart of a sinner in whom it dwells? It tells a sinner he is lost. It empties the sinner of self-confidence and self hope. That is what it does in you who have it. I can say this distinctly, that all of you, you who have faith, really do believe that you are lost in Adam, in self. That without Christ, you can do nothing but sin, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin"; that all your good works so-called, are but death and dead works, as the Apostle speaks of them; dead works. You believe this; faith testifies in you that without Christ you can never pray, never love, never hope, never wait on God, never glorify Him. That is one thing that every believer knows, that he has unbelief. Everyone whom God persuades of the truth of things knows that there is in his nature a prejudice, a lack of faith in his nature. He knows it, and that brings him to see an importance in the petition of some - "Lord increase our faith". O for more faith, is his cry. If you have faith, you bear fruit in prayer. You do pray if you have faith. Like a man who has confidence in a friend, goes to him, and tells him his case, leans on him, looks to his advice, looks to his help, because he has confidence; if you have confidence in God you go to Him. You may not always believe you will have success, but you go to Him. You may not always believe He will help you, but you go to Him. You go to Him for two reasons, among many others. First, the reason of necessity, and second the reason of choice. Who would not go to God who believes in Him? Who must not go to God who believes Him? Every believer must go. Every believer would go; 'tis his choice. O, he cries, sometimes, my vile nature, that opposes my approach to God. And faith, this blessed faith, is in the heart of everyone born of God.

One fruit is waiting. "Wait on the Lord". A hasty nature, an

unbelieving nature, says to the Lord, let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work that we may see it. Faith says, He will do it in His time. "I the Lord will hasten it in His time". He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry, when He shall hear it. O, but He may see it best not to answer it yet. He may see it best, and did see it best, to exercise a believing Abraham by a 20 years delay. A promise given and not fulfilled. Yea, more, He was pleased to promise the goodly land to Abraham and yet He kept Abraham's seed out of that land for 400 years, and moreover the law intervened to cause the godly man earnestly to cry for the fulfilment of the promise. O, if you can pray, if you can wait, God is wise, God is good. O, but our eyes are so on circumstances, and here is the unfruitfulness of our hearts; they are so on circumstances. Why, Elijah might say, now what am I to do? The raven has stopped coming and the brook has stopped running. What am I to do? "Wait on the Lord" says faith. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait I say on the Lord." Oh but it is time. You do not know. God knows when the time is.

He tarries oft till men are faint
And comes at even late

but never too late. Where must the Israelites rush to when, with the Egyptians behind them and the Red Sea before them, they found their helplessness? What must they do? Faith in Moses took the right course, and brought an answer. "Bid the people go forward". It is not an easy thing to go forward with the sea roaring and threatening to swallow you up. "Bid the people go forward". Now that is fruit. Nobody may see it but God; He loves it. Your hearts may scarcely see it, but God sees it; He loves it. He loves the fruit of His own life in the soul. He loves the fruit of His own power in the soul. I believe God is greatly honoured in the souls of His children when they believe against flesh and blood, against reason, against appearances, and they wait on Him. That is fruit my friends. Every branch in Me that beareth fruit. When you love Him, what fruit it is. When the very Name of Jesus sometimes is such sweet music in your heart as to make your heart dance. When you leap at the thought of His precious love; when your eyes, suffused with tears because of your base requitals of such love, when you feel now Lord do not leave me to

this wretched state again. Keep my soul alive, yea lively. When His very Name is as ointment poured forth and you love Him all the more for His kindness, and His forbearance, and His goodness to you. Humility is fruit. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God". Pride, that monster pride, that dreadful evil; what does it do but barrenise us? God's mercies are not half enough for pride. The positions He places us in are not good enough for pride. The withdrawing of things is bitter to pride; hence rebellion and discontent with the God of all our mercies and with the very mercies themselves. O, but when the Lord works, and you say, I have got nothing to complain of but sin, that is good. When He works, and you say, there is no place too little for me now; I can get down, I am down. The Lord has put me down, mercifully done it, graciously and tenderly done it, and I found what is in the Pilgrims' Progress to be true. O Mr Great Heart said, he had been through the valley so many times; his health never was better. And the pilgrims in the valley they loved and kissed the flowers that grew there. And that is just the fruit of the Spirit, bearing fruit.

Believing in hope against hope, believing in God when there is nothing tangible, nothing in the world as it were that you can lay hold of; that is bearing fruit. Abraham gave glory to God, believing that a dead providence can be made alive. Believing that the Lord who has promised it, will do it, that He will make the crooked straight and the rough places plain.

Every branch that beareth fruit. What does He do with it? Say, now it is alright, and I am pleased with the branch and nothing more is needed? O, no. He purgeth it, cleans, dresses, takes care of it. You say, why does this trouble come? Says Job, I was not at ease, nor in rest, yet trouble came. I was looking to the Lord, yet trouble came. As far as I know I was not walking in any known sin, yet trouble came. This is the explanation of it. Every branch that beareth fruit He takes trouble with it; He takes trouble with it. O, it is a great honour for God to take trouble with anybody. A great honour to be afflicted, when affliction is used by the Lord as the husbandman uses the knife, the pruning knife. His eye knows what to cut off and what to leave. "He purgeth it". He makes it clean. "Now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you". This purging of the

fruit-bearing branch means affliction of some sort or kind;
affliction that

Makes us see
What else would scape our sight
How very foul and dim are we
And God how pure and bright

Affliction that calls us off from too intent a looking to this world. Affliction that puts matters right, as the Apostle Paul expresses it - "Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." When you are far from God, you who fear and love Him know this is true then temporal things assume an importance that is out of all proper proportion. But when you are near the Lord, then eternal things have the weight and the proper proportion. Grace puts things right; grace puts people right; grace cleanses the vision, removes the mist. Grace brings people into a proper state of mind. "He purgeth it". He takes trouble with it. Did the Lord ever take trouble with you? Did He ever take the trouble to show you your sins, here and there? Did He ever take the pains of convincing you that you were wrong in that position and wrong in that thing? Did it mortify me? you say; did it end in mortification? O no, it ended in mercy coming and softening and humbling and bringing me into the dust. It ended in my loving the Lord and kissing the rod and waiting for His goodness to appear and help me through. "He purgeth it". There is an important word in the Proverbs - "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise". O, if God reproves us, I do not know how properly to express the mercy that is in it. If He takes care of us, like a father, seeing his wayward and strong-willed son hedges him about with prohibitions, and when the strong will of the child has led him to do something that is wrong, something that was forbidden, now the father says the rod must be used. The child does not like the solitary room, does not like the plain meal that is sent it. O no, he would rather be at the table, but the love of the father says this is the proper course, this is the right way. God's wise love chastens His children therefore to bring forth more fruit. He will have faith

grow and love increase and humility to clothe. He will bring His children into a right place and frame. "He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit. And when you get a little more you will say, O I wish I could bear fruit to the glory of God. "Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." You shall be seen and known to be My disciples because you bear this fruit. Says the Apostle in the Hebrews - "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby". What does the trouble do? O, it exercises me, says one. I wonder what the Lord has to say against me. I wonder if I have been guilty of some particular sin. I wonder if there is any wrong in me that I do not know. It exercises me. Well, and a good thing it is. "The simple pass on and are punished but the prudent man forseeth the evil and hideth himself". He turns to Christ in his trouble and asks that the Lord would deal kindly with him and remember him; remember not his former sins and deal not with him according to his iniquities, and he gets good out of it. He gets the good that Paul, in the same Epistle, mentions when he says - "If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not"

"I am the true vine". I am the source of all your fruitfulness; all your justification, all your sanctification, you must receive from Me. All faith, and love and hope and patience and humility, and every grace you must receive from Me. "I am the true vine". Fruit that comes from Christ glorifies Christ and the Father and the Spirit. Fruit that comes from us is cold; no fruit. Israel is an empty vine, empty yet he has fruit; he brings it to himself. "And every branch that beareth not fruit in Me He taketh away". O what a solemn thing. "And every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit". May the Lord bring us to consider this and speak it home to our hearts.