

SB  
436

1397-139  
La P812

132

Prayer Meeting Address by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Friday evening 2 March 1923

JOHN 15 verses 1-8

This is an instructive and encouraging and searching and trembling word. "I am the vine". It would seem as if the Lord made choice of this figure because of the richness, the fatness, and abundant fruitfulness, of the vine. Does He not answer to that? The love of God, the Covenant of Grace, the purposes of the Father, the infinite merit of the atonement, the perfection of justifying righteousness, the faithfulness of God, the office that Christ sustains as the Mediator, in all these things you have the richness of the vine, that good and fat olive. If there be no union with this vine there is nothing but death. This is the encouragement of the word, that Christ is such a vine to His people and in them, that no sense of barrenness that they may have and be tried by shall be any hindrance to that fruit bearing which comes, and can come, alone from Himself. "My Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away." and this is the searching of the word, a penetrating word to one, who at times, looks in vain for any fruit in himself; poor withered stick, without root, having no root in himself. And such a word as this to such a person may be most penetrating and searching. You may look at yourselves, O people of God, and judge that you more resemble this fruitless branch than the fruit bearing one, and then the word may make you fear exceedingly. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". May we never have this solemn thing done in us. To talk about religion, to hang about it, to have all the trappings of it, and yet have no union to the Lord Jesus is an exceedingly solemn thing, and may bring, may well bring us, in our state of barrenness to a searching of our hearts and a trying of our ways. "Every branch". Christ is particular. We are mixing and general in self; He is particular. He does not look at a vine and take, as it were, a view of the whole of it, and say it is healthy, but He looks at every branch. He looks at you, He looks at me, and what does He see in us? Do you, at any time, think and hope that the searching eye of Christ can discern a little fruitfulness? Is there faith? Is there prayer? Is there hope? Is there, at any

time, an inshining? Is there grace to make you repent with that repentance which is not to be repented of? Is there an inflowing of the grace of the Spirit making you tender in your conscience, humble in your heart, full of hope in Christ, of love to His blessed Name, to His Person, and to His work? If none of these things ever be in us then this is true, and will be true - "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away", and men shall gather them. Some error, some heresy, will gather the empty branch of the professor. "Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself". O what a lopping off of branches there will be one day.

"And every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit"; looks after it, takes care of it. Anything looking wrong upon it, or about it, brings forth His care and His skill. Does the Lord take pains with you? Does He come and reprove you? One of the worst signs that a professor can ever carry about with him is that - no reproof. Ezekiel had his tongue made to cleave to the roof of his mouth that he should not be a reprover to the people. Was it not solemn? Do you never get reproofs? If you do not, it is not because you do not need them, but it sorely looks as if the Lord has no care for you, that you are a barren branch. "Every branch that beareth fruit" - the fruit of grace, not nature. Faith in the bleeding Lamb, faith that tells you what a poor creature you are, but what a good God the Lord Jesus is. Hope in His mercy, hope that is cast into that which is within the veil. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil". Love, love to Jesus Christ and His. Love to His gospel, love to His Person. There were a good many people in the days of His flesh who said, depart from us; get out of our coast. His presence troubled them; they suffered loss, and they said depart out of our coasts. What do you say to Him in your hearts? What do I say to Him in my heart? Do we say this - "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" Lord, I think there is room; I feel there is need; my heart desires Thee. When wilt Thou come? I call that something like fruit and it is so acceptable that Christ will regard it and nourish it. Humility, a tender conscience, a broken spirit, a contrite heart, these are fruits. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ. Being filled with them, not dangling them about for everyone to look at. Not some external things that you do and are

pleased because you do them, but being filled in your hearts and consciences and wills and affections with the fruits of His mercy, the fruits of His righteousness, the fruits of His atonement. "He purgeth it". "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you", and the word "purgeth" and the word "clean" are the same really. The translators made a difference, but the word really is one word. Now ye are clean; now I have dealt with you. Does not the solemn Word of God cleanse you? When He speaks a promise, does not that cleanse you from your fear which hath torment, and your unbelief that barrenises you? When He shines upon you in His sweet and full gospel, does not that cleanse some of your barrenness away? When He shines into your understanding does not that remove some of your ignorance? It purges your ignorance away. "He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit". More fruit; a stronger faith - "Lord increase our faith". A brighter hope - that ye may be filled "with all joy and peace in believing", and "abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost". (Romans 15 v 13). Humility - "Be clothed with humility". "God resisteth the proud". Confidence in Him, sweet, humble confidence in Him, that will enable you to depend on Him and keep your soul in patience in a time of affliction. "He purgeth it". He alone can do it. More sap, more vigour flowing from Him into your heart will be the cleansing of the things from you, the cleansing of those things which are displeasing to Him, which are really barrenness.

"Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you". We see sometimes in the disciples how ignorance cropped up and how it came out of their lips. Ignorance of Him, of His intentions and of His coming; why He came. Then He taught them a little and that cleansed them. They said one to another, on one occasion, "He saith a little....." and so on. We do not know what He says. Then He said later in the same chapter - I came forth from the Father and I return to Him, and then they were cleansed in that particular. So they said, now we know and believe. So when Christ teaches a sinner He cleanses him from his ignorance; some of it. Do not expect to lose it all at once. By little and little He will teach and guide and bring you on in the way to heaven, that ultimately nothing shall be found wanting to you. "Through the word which I have spoken unto you". What intimacy there is between one of the branches and the root. What intimacy there

is between a sinner to whom the Saviour speaks. O covet this spiritual thing - to hear the Lord speak. "Which I have spoken." If you reproved a friend, unless you had faith and hope and love, you might give offence. If Christ reproves then we hear and fear and fruitfulness is the result, some fruitfulness, some increase wrought in your soul. We little know, at times, the blessing of reproof, of affliction. "He purgeth it". He takes care of it. He says, here is life in this branch; here are buds in this branch; here is promise of fruit. So He takes care of it. The frost shall not nip that bud, it shall not kill that life. The Lord takes care of it.

"Abide in Me". How can you, without faith. Faith in Him is an abiding in Him. Faith that cleaves to Him is an abiding. They were cleaving to Him when they said "To whom shall we go?" That was an abiding. Many had gone back. To them He appealed; to these, His disciples, He appealed, and said "Will ye also go away?" And then this abiding in Him in them was manifested - "To whom shall we go?". The Psalmist also was abiding in Him when he said, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee." Job was abiding in Him when he said - "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," and again when he said - "O that I knew where I might find Him; that I might come even to His seat". Joseph was abiding in Him when he was walking with God in prison; when he clave to his Master and Lord and God in the midst of temptation. Poor sinner, if you have faith, you will cleave to Christ and that is abiding in Him.

"And I in you". If grace flows into our hearts, what is it, but a part of Christ in whom all the fulness of grace dwells? If the Word of Christ comes into your soul it is a part of this word - "And I in you". But when a revelation of Him is made and when He comes in, when His train fills the temple, when you embrace Him the antidote of death, when you say - "My Lord and My God", then in a more abundant manner and measure He abides in you. And here I would again use the word I have just used, there is intimacy. O how intimate, how near is He to you; how near are you to Him. This, when experienced, sets a sinner's face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem above. This makes the world a dim object and its most substantial things but as vanity by comparison. This wins the heart, this brings the will in a most supple condition to

God. This brings the understanding and the affections all to Him. As Paul speaks, so it is known. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ". (2 Corinthians 10 v 5).

"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me." Will this be a saddening explanation to any of us of the barrenness that marks and mars us so much? Does this say to you, now your barrenness comes from your distance from the root, the lack of sensible union, the lack of communications from God? And if this is so, does it make you fear? Does it make you wonder if that terrible word may yet take place in you - "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". O barrenness is a trouble sometimes to some people. It is a trouble to me. My barrenness is a trouble to me.

When on the boughs rich fruit we see  
Tis then we cry, a goodly tree

But when there is nothing of the kind, or apparently nothing of the kind, you fear and it would not be kind in anyone or proper to say to you, O but you are alright, you know the truth, you can go back to some things. No, my friends, barrenness is not cured by that, nor is fear properly removed by that. Do not sew pillows to each other's arms. Christ's Word is a solemn Word, penetrating, searching, trying, but if He is pleased to speak it with this good, gracious intention to us, it will be a mercy and it will be seen by fruitfulness. Do not misplace this matter, It is not in the doing, and it is not external altogether nor indeed principally. It is in that which is in the heart - "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness", and I am disposed to say that the greatest fruitfulness that you will ever have will be between you and God in secret. Wont men see it? They will see the effect of it. Even the wicked may be constrained to glorify your Father which is in heaven by attributing to what they do not understand that which they see in you. O, but it is solemn to be barren and in this dreadful day, when the world is wandering after the beast, when every kind of error and heresy we see abounding on the

right hand and on the left, and when there are many anti-christs and many preachers of anti-christs, saying lo here is Christ and lo there is Christ, it is a wonderful mercy to be made tender, to be filled with a solemn concern about self, about this great point - "Have I union with the Church's living Head?"

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing." A very true word, but may we never be left to shelter, in any of our ungraciousness, behind this word - "Without Me ye can do nothing". It is no shelter for barrenness; it is an explanation of it, but no shelter, no excuse. "He that abideth in Me" by precious faith, by spiritual love, by coming daily by constant application to Me for My mercy, by running after Me, seeking to possess Me, by panting for Me as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, by solemnly feeling that there is none in heaven or in earth beside Myself who is desired, he that so abideth in Me by prayer, secret prayer - for which you will never find any substitute - "and I in him" by My being in him the hope of glory and by My communicating to him my mercy, by giving him the golden oil to make him fruitful, the same branch beareth much fruit.

This word "much" may try us as many of God's words may. Much? You look perhaps in vain for any sometimes. May the Lord cause us to bring forth much fruit individually and as a church and congregation - the godly in it - for, as the Lord takes notice of individuals, so we see He also takes notice of churches. And all the churches shall know that I search the reins and try the hearts of the children of men. Do you feel any concern about this point? "For without Me" in you, without Me communicating to you of My life and My grace and My light and My mercy and My Spirit; without Me graciously helping you, drawing you, attracting you, reprovng you, cleansing you; without Me in these particulars and others, "ye can do nothing". Nothing? Cannot I pray? Not in nature. Cannot I believe? No, except with a notional faith. Rational indeed it may seem to you to be, but, not being the faith of the operation of God, it will do nothing. Cannot believe, cannot hope, cannot cleave to Christ nor follow after Him. It is a solemn word. O sinner, how does it affect you? O professor how do you stand? How do you stand by this wondrous, this beautiful,

striking figure of the vine and the branches? May it please the Holy Spirit to work in us both to will and to do of God's good pleasure.

AMEN.