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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 4 December 1935

JOHN 15 v 2

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.

This beautiful figure of the vine is both instructive and encouraging; instructive because it sets before us the good and fat root from which all fruit must come. It says this, in effect, that all a barren soul needs, there is the full supply for it in this vine. If we are illuminated by the Holy Ghost on this point it will be a useful instruction; it is very encouraging. You remember the case of the murmuring of Korah and his company against Moses and Aaron; how that God decided the case by telling the various tribes, each one, to bring a rod, a stick cut out of a tree, a rod, and write the name on it of each tribe. So twelve rods were presented to Moses and he laid them before the Lord one night and in the morning he took those rods out of the tabernacle. Eleven were just as they were put in the previous night; the twelfth, Aaron's rod, budded and bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds. All a sinner needs, when God has quickened his soul and given him faith, is just to cast himself on this blessed Jesus Christ, here set before us as the true vine, and the fruit he needs, the fruitfulness he desires before God, will be conveyed to him by the vine. O, if the Holy Spirit would just bring these two points before us, yea, put them into our hearts, it would be an encouragement as well as an instruction to us.

But the verse I have read is very solemn. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". A consideration is this, first. Here is a branch, a professor, a professor of religion, a professor of Christ - and by that profession he is said to be in Christ - but he does not bring forth fruit; he has no vital union with the vine; he is not grafted into the vine; he merely professes that he is a Christian, a believer, but, having no union with Christ, there is no Christian fruit, no fruit of life, no fruit of illumination, no

fruit of union with the Son of God. There are solemn illustrations of this in the Scripture; let me call your attention to one or two of them. Take the first branch that was not vitally united to Christ which we have in the Scripture - Cain. A religious man, had no doubt listened to the teaching of his father, had heard of God's justice, had heard of the coats of skin made by God to clothe Adam and Eve, had been instructed in the worship of God, and there was an effect of all that; he was a religious man and showed that religion by taking of the fruits of the earth, the fruit of his own labour, and offered it to God. That was not pleasing; it was not fruit from the Lord Himself. It was not the fruit of righteousness nor of faith; just a religious offering without any reference to the character of God. If we have a religion that has no reference to God, to the character of God, to the requirements of God, as revealed in the Scripture, in the gospel, we shall not be regarded as fruit bearing branches, but we shall be taken away. Cain was taken away. God, in His holy justice and providence, took Cain away. He went out from the Lord's presence and built a city. We hear no more about him as being a branch; he was just taken away.

You take Ahithophel, David's friend and counsellor; they walked together in sweet counsel and company to the house of God. He bore no fruit though, to please God, for when the opportunity came that would seem to be a likelihood of deriving benefit from his rebellion against his master and friend, he went away; he was taken away. He gave wise counsel; God defeated it and he went out and hanged himself. How many people, professing people, have been driven and taken away in that manner, notwithstanding their profession of religion.

You take Demas; he is named as a friend in one place; he is named afterwards as having loved this present world. He forsook Christ; he forsook his profession and went after the world. Hymenaeus and Philetus made shipwreck as concerning faith, and they were delivered over to Satan; they were taken away. Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, were professors; they professed Christ; they had a place in the Church. O, solemn, the covetousness of their heart - and their religion was a religion of a kind - moved them to sell their land and keep part of the price and they lied to God, they lied to the

Holy Ghost, and they were taken away. God took them away.

We read in the Epistle of Jude of Core and his company who rebelled against Moses and Aaron; they were professors; they belonged to the tribe of Levi; and God took them away. Very solemn, He took them away. Jude tells us of professors whose fruit withered; twice dead, he said, plucked up by the roots. "Every branch in Me". This may touch us; it may make some of us afraid. Have we vital union with this living Vine or are we mere professors? Every man's work shall be tried by fire of what sort it is. Providence, God uses to make men manifest or, if they reach their death bed without any exposure, then like sheep are they laid in the grave. Because they fear not God they have no changes. I say, this makes one afraid; it sets the soul trembling. How will it be with me? If you fear God you wont say I am determined to hold on. You will say: "Hold Thou me up". Keep me; keep me in the hour of temptation; keep me when the enemy may come in like a flood; keep me from the wickedness and the corruption of my nature. "He taketh away". The mystery of divine providence is very great and there is no resisting it. Providence carries people away like a flood. May the Lord keep us. That is the first part of the text. "Every branch" - it gets the honour of a branch, the name, by profession, - "that beareth not fruit" - does not bring forth the fruit of grace; does not bear fruit patiently, as the parable of the Sower has it - "He taketh away". The wayside professor is taken away; the thorny ground hearer is taken away. Cares of this life, deceitfulness of riches, carry men away. Trouble carries people away when not sanctified. This may cause some of you, as it does me, to search and try our ways; yea, to cry to God "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Now the next part of the text is very sweet, very trying. "Every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it" - gives trouble, sends chastening and affliction, that the fruit it bears may be increased - "that it may bring forth more fruit". This spells union, living union to the vine, real union to Christ, grafting into Him by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost. As enabled I will try to speak to you a little of this bearing fruit; it shows itself in two ways. First in

secret. When faith is in exercise that is a secret thing; that is a fruit of God in your soul. When living faith is in your soul it takes advantage of all things that come. It takes advantage of Christ and His merciful, gracious, powerful intercession; His precious blood, His justifying righteousness. I mean this; your faith, when in exercise, goes to God and mentions these perfections of Christ; the merits of Christ, the sweetness of Christ, the sufficiency of Christ; that is a fruit. Faith is called the fruit of the Spirit and it is a wonderful fruit too. It says to the mountain, depart; it brings a filling up of all valleys; it brings the soul to God; it takes trouble to Him; it pleads with Him; it confesses before Him; it presents its requests to God in the Name of the Lord Jesus. A secret life this is.

True faith's the life of God
Deep in the heart it lies
It lives and labours under load
Though damped, it never dies

Now that is one fruit, the fruit of faith. You will find it working variously according to your condition. You will find sometimes it does just what Peter speaks of - purifying their hearts by faith. What is that? What is it to have your heart purified by faith? Why all the idols and the worldliness and the unbelief and the hardness of heart and the corruptions of nature, fallen nature, these faith goes to God about, speaks to Him of them, confesses them, and does utterly renounce them, and, though the root of them is in the heart, the heart, as to its affections and feelings and desires and movements, is purified from them by this blessed grace of faith. O, the times that some of us have been enabled thus to walk before God; when Christ, and Christ alone, has been the Object of our desire and of our love and of our hope; when nothing has, for the moment, intervened; when He, and He alone, has been, as it were, with us. That faith has said to Him: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". See how faith purified the heart of Asaph. He was greatly defiled by his rebellion and confusion, by his attempt to see how God was right in providence and to try to make straight what God had made crooked. You cannot think wrong things of God without defilement; you cannot quarrel with His providence

without defilement. You cannot try to put straight what He makes crooked without defilement. It brings guilt on your conscience. So Asaph found Him and he felt himself and confessed himself to be more brutish than any man; he was as a beast before the Lord. Now when the Lord took him in hand, so to express it, and carried him from himself, as it were, into the sanctuary, and illuminated his understanding and touched his heart, and caused him to see secrets, O, then he said, now I see what a fool I have been, what a beast I am. Now I see that tribulation is good; that a slippery path leads to hell and men go suddenly into hell who are set in that slippery path. And so he said to God: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" None can save me but Thyself. Whom on earth do I desire beside Thee? I am sick of my own company, I am sick of my own thoughts, I am weary of trying to straighten crooked things. Now Lord, let me have Thyself. Some of you understand that; that is a fruit of faith. Faith will handle troubles well. "Whoso handleth a matter wisely shall find good". If you have faith it will handle matters, providences, it will handle them wisely. What is that wise handling? Taking all the things to God; casting your care upon God; leaving yourself and your matters with God. Faith, therefore, is a wonderful fruit of the Spirit in the heart, but it is secret.

Another fruit of the Spirit is hope; living hope; not the hope of the hypocrite, but a living hope; hope that is not seen; hope that is cast as an anchor into that which is within the veil; hope that says, "I shall yet praise Him". It does not say, this crook will be put straight and I shall manage better; it does not say, tomorrow will be better than today. No, living hope just lives before God. If we hope for that we see not, if we hope for a deliverance that none but God can command, for guidance which He alone can give, for support which must be on His own arm; if we live in hope in those things, that is a fruit, a sweet fruit too; sweet to the soul as well as pleasing to God.

Another fruit is love; one of the most blessed fruits of the Spirit in a sinner's heart

Love to Jesus Christ and His
Fixes the heart above
Love gives everlasting bliss
But who can give us love?

It is the fruit of the Spirit and it is secret in its movements for the most part, though, as I shall speak a little later, it is an open grace, but it is a secret grace. I have mentioned to you before what Dr Goodwin says - let me name it again here - "Jesus Christ is most glorified in secret", and when you have love to Him you praise Him, you cling to Him, you follow Him, you embrace Him; there is none like Him to you. How sweet are His words; how wise are His dealings; how sufficient is His grace, is His power. Love is not offended. "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me", in My dealings with him. The Lord may desert you for a time and give you no particular reason for it. His testimony of Job was that he was a perfect man and upright, one that feared God and yet the Lord gave the devil leave to afflict him. You may get trouble without God telling you why you get it. Now love will hold fast; love prevailed for a time in Job wonderfully. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord". Love was in his heart. Love to Jesus Christ is a great grace; what a mercy to have it.

Patience is another grace and that is secret for the most part. When you can lie passive in the hands of God; when your will is just made straight with the will of God; when you would not, if you might, alter things that are painful and afflictive, but just feel your soul is in the hands of God; waiting for Him to work, waiting at His gates, watching at the posts of His doors to see how He will work and how He will come to you. Meekness of spirit, tenderness of conscience, all these come from grace and are fruits and they are secret, really secret. It is like a man living in secret and no eye sees him, no ear hears what he is saying, save God. What a mercy it is to have a private religion, a religion that does not depend on creatures, a religion that you enjoy in secret, a religion that makes you say, sometimes, I am most in company when alone. A paradox understood only by the saint who knows what it is to get near to God. "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit", this secret fruit.

Then it is open. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven". If men talk about religion and their works do not verify their talk, their talk is vain. When I say, open, I believe I intend what the Lord intends. He did not intend that His people should be bragging and boasting and talking about their good works. No, a cup of cold water given secretly, that is to say, the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing; that is an open thing. Open to God and open really as between the giver and the receiver. Your light and illumination of the Holy Ghost teaching you what is right, how to profess God, how to walk in His Name, and in His clean, holy, fear; that can come, and only come, from the good root, from the Vine, Jesus Christ.

This open fruit consists in several things which I can only name to you and you will be able to fill up for yourselves.

First, in the profession of the Name of Christ. "Whosoever believeth with His heart and with his mouth makes confession the same shall be saved". There is a lip talk which tendeth to penury; there is a gracious confession which brings peace. It was a wonderful, gracious confession that the Eunuch made: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". "Every tongue that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God". Now that is a wonderful mercy. We may be afraid of speaking sometimes; at other times we are obliged to speak to a friend, to speak of what we hope the Lord has done; some communion He has granted us; some gracious visitation He has blessed us with or some intimation of His mercy. Mind this, confession of the truth is a great mercy and an open fruit. Who is he that believes? The man who confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; confesses with his mouth, what he believes in his heart. "Every branch that beareth fruit", the fruit of faith; that is, who lets his light shine before men that they may see his good works, that is, his consistent life. He, whose feet do not contradict his lips; that what he says he bears out in his conduct with men; is a branch that bears fruit.

The fruit of growth in grace; to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. A very trying point

this, to one who feels barren, ignorant; who says honestly, at times, I do not know - I wish I did know - the Lord, and who in secret cries: "That which I see not teach Thou me". Yet, though he is being led more deeply into a knowledge of himself, more deeply into a knowledge of the evil of legality, that he may receive Christ more fully as a Saviour; that will be a bearing of fruit. When affliction comes on you and you are troubled - day and night you are in some trouble; you may feel you can hardly bear it - or some temptation comes on you and you are afraid of falling by it, what is the fruit you bear? Your friends may see you are in trouble; they know you are. What is the fruit? Casting the whole care on God, leaving it with Him and you will wash your face, not to appear unto men to fast; you will be fasting before God; you will be waiting on Him. Every branch in Me that beareth this fruit; it is a good branch; it has vital union with the living Vine.

Another fruit is perseverance, holding on. "If", says Paul, "ye hold fast the beginning of your confidence". "Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward". To come short, O, to come short, is a fearful thing. To hold on, to keep your profession, to have your feet washed, from time to time - feet which you have defiled by some sin - and to have communications from Christ which strengthen you and enable you to say, Thou I am faint I will pursue; to enable you to say I will call on Him, though I am weak He is strong; though I am ignorant, He is wisdom itself and I will go to Him, I will cleave to Him; this is bearing fruit. O, what a wonder. I think it is Romaine who says something like this: It is a wonder for a little torch to be kept burning in a tempestuous sea. It is a wonder for that little faith you have, the little religion you feel you have got, to be kept alive.

AMEN.