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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 8 October 1930

JOHN 15 v 5

"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"

The fall severed us from God, and therefore we became dead. A solemn truth, and it would do us good to believe it more than we do. The fall brought our expulsion from Eden, and reduced us to a homeless state, vagabonds, vagrants. What a condition! If we only believed it, if only we felt it more than we do, we should be more under a sense of the need of redeeming love, of union with the Lord Jesus. It is one thing for us to talk about sin, but it would be a blessing to believe, and feel, original sin, and the many awful consequences of it. The depravity of our nature, the continual disposition to leave God, and turn to self, and the deep - the, to us, fathomless - wickedness of our nature. May the Lord make us to believe this in His great mercy; believe that the fall separated from God, and that, being separated from God, we cannot be other than dead things - "dead in trespasses and sins". Dead to God, and goodness; dead to all holiness, to all uprightness, to all tenderness for God's honour, and are just enemies, poor miserable enemies. What infinite love of God is manifested in the constitution of the Lord Jesus Christ, and giving to Him the various titles that He bears, and that are revealed to us in the Scriptures. And the title that here He takes tells us that, if we believe, if we really believe the deadness of our state by reason of our separation from God, it will move us to cry to Him to grant us union with Himself. The only remedy for our state, the only remedy for our death, is union to Christ, the true vine. In the Scriptures there are one or two notable vines mentioned. One is where God calls His degenerate nation the vine of Sodom. "Their vine is the vine of Sodom". They had gone so far away from Him in their idolatries that they were just like those vines of Sodom. The fruit looks beautiful - according to historians it looks very beautiful, but when it is

touched, and pressed a little, it bursts, and there is nothing but poisonous dust inside a beautiful appearance. The vine of Sodom; that vine lives today; the Church of Rome. And now - by the treachery of the Archbishops, and Bishops - the Church of England is becoming just like a vine of Sodom. And so are the Free Churches, so called. Either Popery or Modernism you will find reigning, more or less, in the religion of today. Well, this vine, that is called the vine of Sodom, is described in another manner in Hosea. It is said - "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself". As they were prospered, so they made altars to themselves. Nothing grew out of their prosperity, but self. All their fruit was to themselves. They were saying - "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." And God did not own them, was not with them. And all the fruitfulness that men talk about today is just fruitfulness to themselves.

Now the Lord, with His disciples at His feet - He being their Master, and their Teacher - tells them that He Himself is the true vine. By looking at these false vines, He says - "I am the true vine", God's vine. Whenever we read of the Lord Jesus bearing certain characters, and being the Substitute for His people, and their great High Priest, we are to understand that He is, in those relations, and characters, just, in the Covenant, subordinate to His Father, and here He says - "I am the true vine, and My Father" - whose equal He is in the Godhead, but whose subordinate He is in the Covenant - "My Father is the husbandman". And the husbandman's part is to look at the vine. Its branches, are they trailing? He must nail them up. Are they making too much wood, and not much fruit? Then he must cleanse, or purge these by cutting, pruning, them, saying, as it were, in every act of pruning, it is better for the vine to bleed than to degenerate. Do we properly prize the pruning of God? for the pruning respects the branches. The vine is pure - nothing wrong with the vine, the root, the stock - but these branches have such a disposition to degenerate that they need the attention of the husbandman, and they get it. By God's mercy, some of us can say, we have had that wonderful owning of God, that He has come with the pruning knife, come to pull back, and tie up, the trailing branches, the worldliness, and cut away the wood that would have no fruit on it. O, how thankful we ought to be for God's pruning. The vine has a fat root, a root of

life, a root of fruitfulness, a power to bear fruit. So has Christ. He is the root of life in His people, and the power of His resurrection brings fruit in them, brings it forth to the praise of God. The wood of the vine, of itself, is very profitless. Who would take so much of it as to make a pin? asks the Lord, of the vine wood. But the humanity of Christ is not alone; it has the eternal Son of God in it, and the love of God, and the grace of God, given to Him for the church; and the fullness of the Godhead, the wisdom of God, and the power of God, and the truth of God, and the Covenant of God; He possesses all. And so He is a root of life, a root of holiness, a root of goodness, a root of power; that is to say, a root to bring forth fruit. I wish we knew more of Christ; that I knew more of Him; that you knew more of Him. We are dead things without Him. We are miserable creatures, without Him. We are barren professors, without Him. We are wanderers from God, without Him. We become dead in confidence, or dead in feeling, or prayerless, or worldly - something wrong in us - without the influence of this root, this blessed vine. O, my brethren, I wish you knew more of this blessed vine, that I, with you, knew more of Him. It is true - "Without Me ye can do nothing", says Christ. Cannot pray, cannot love, cannot fear God, cannot walk with God, cannot bear fruit to the glory of God, without Christ. But this word - "Without Me ye can do nothing" - is not a shelter for slothfulness, nor for worldliness, nor for anything of the flesh. It is just a great truth, saying in the heart where it is spoken, Come to Me for all you need. Would you be lively? That liveliness must come from Me. Would you bear fruit to the glory of God? That fruitfulness must come from Me. Would you accept My dealings in chastisement? That power to accept must come from Me. Would you be meek, and lowly in heart, and find rest to your souls? That meekness, that lowliness, must come from Me. - "Without Me ye can do nothing."

Now look at this - "I am the vine". This calls for notice, - this I would put before you if God would help me - the greatness of Christ, the fruitfulness of Christ, the necessity of Christ in everything. I am the root of all your goodness, all your graces. Who made Him this? He was made this in the Covenant, in the Council of Peace. It is expressed in other words by Paul, where he says to Timothy, of God the Father - "Who hath saved us and called us with an

holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His Own purpose and grace, which was given us..." - given to Him for us - "before the world began" (2 Timothy 1 v 9). Christ had all this. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell". The fullness of the Spirit dwells in Christ. The Spirit was given to Him without measure. A solemn commandment was given to Christ by His Father. The commandment was this, that Christ should lay down His life. He had power to lay it down; He had power to take it again. "This commandment have I received of My Father". And here is the centre of all good, the death of Jesus Christ. The death of Christ is the life of the church. The death of Christ was the guilty death of His people, was the loving death of the Redeemer, the infinitely meritorious death of the Substitute; was the one offering that the High Priest made of Himself without spot to God. Now all this speaks of the fruitfulness of the vine, the true vine, God's vine, God's merit, God's substitution of Himself in the Man Christ Jesus for the church. Now this is Christ's word. One effect of believing it must be this, that we shall go to Him, depend on Him, pray to Him, seek union with Him, and the fruitfulness that must come from Him. Do we believe this word - "I am the vine". Nobody doubts it, as reading it, but how many of us believe it? Really, in the heart, and soul, believe this of the Lord Jesus. Whenever we do believe it in heart, and soul, we are found - if I may so speak - we are found on our knees before Him, we are found seeking Him. Every minute that we really believe this, we are seeking closer union with Him. The many hours we do not practically believe it, are hours of barrenness, and some of us really believe this. I have minutes, I trust, when I believe it, but I have many hours when I do not. I do not doubt it, I do not deny it, but I do not practically believe it. Hence my deadness, my coldness, my distance. Hence the prevalence in thought, and mind, and affections, of corruption. "Without Me" - without My sap, my influence - "ye can do nothing". "I am the vine" by the Father's appointment. "I am the vine" by the Spirit's indwelling. "I am the vine" by My Own love, My Own grace, My Own purpose. I lovingly came, I lovingly died for you. "I am the vine" to you. This, as rightly believed, is a great encouragement to seekers; seekers who say in their hearts at times,

Lord make the union closer yet

O bring me near to thyself, and more, and more may I be united to Thee, so as to bear fruit.

Next, look at what He says to us, if we are His people. "Ye are the branches". How do sinners become branches in the vine? They are like all other men, these branches, by nature. No difference between Jew and Gentile, Different degrees of sinning, but no different degrees in original sin. In the cemetery death reigns, but there are differences in the degrees of corruption. We have buried a godly man today. There are bodies there that have been long buried and the difference between the corpse we have put in the grave today and those bodies is only in this, that they are more corrupt and nearer being dust. That is all. Death is the same. How then does any man become a branch in Christ? The Scripture gives us the answer. Electing love; given to Christ. In His prayer in this gospel, the Lord Jesus says to His Father, of His people - "Thine they were and Thou gavest them Me". O, if we have one evidence, Scriptural evidence, of having been given to the Lord Jesus by His Father, what favoured people we are. Have you any evidence that God loves you? Any teaching, any owning, any blessing? Any touch of the Spirit's grace, any moving after God, any coming of God to you? All such things are evidences of having been given to the Lord Jesus Christ by His Father. Men cannot put themselves into this vine. Mechanically, if I may so express it, professors attach themselves to Christianity. They call themselves Christians, they speak of Christ, but union with Him, that is another matter. Has God given us to His Son, Jesus Christ? That is the first thing in respect of being a branch; given to Christ to be a branch, a member. A member - to speak of another figure used to set forth this same union. Given to be a member of His body. "Members of His body in particular". Another figure used in the Scriptures to express this union is part of a building - "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2 v 22) "Rooted and grounded in love", and growing up into Him as into our living head in all things. To be a branch is to be saved. To be a branch is to have new life in you. To be a branch is to have this blessed sap flowing into your soul at times. To be a branch is to have holiness in you. The good, fat root, is a holy root, and so, if we be united to this root, we have the sap - flowing into our hearts from time to time - of holiness.

"He that abideth in Me". What is this abiding? What is it to abide in the vine? It is the abiding of faith. Faith cannot live without its great Object and end. You will never get on without Christ comfortably if you are branches in the vine. Faith will go to Him, will hang about Him, will argue with Him, plead with Him, speak to Him, seek to have Him speaking to you. Faith wont let Him alone. Faith wont have a substitute for Christ; neither self, nor the world, nor devil. Faith will have no substitute for Christ. One went after the Apostle Paul and his companions, and said - These men show unto us the way of salvation. O but Paul turned and rebuked her. Depend upon it, if we have faith, none but Christ will suit us, or please us. There will be no substitute for Him. The devil sends a good many substitutes and they say, I am Christ; Christ is here; Christ is there. Said the Lord Jesus, Go not after them, go not after them. And faith, looking to Him, says, at times, None but the Lord Jesus for me. And faith is a perceiving grace. Faith is a perceiving grace. "My sheep know My voice" There is something in Christ, there is that in the communications which He makes, there is that life, that conviction, that power, that humbling grace that the people of God know, and love, and desire to have more and more of. And this is to abide in Him. The abiding of faith. With all your unbelief, can you say you abide in Him, go to Him? You may not believe that you are interested in Him - you may not have got to that yet - but can you say there is in you a spirit that goes out to the Lord Jesus, that says to Him, I would be Thine, I would know Thee, I would love Thee, I would have Thee in my heart the hope of glory. O may I? May such a blessing come to me?

To abide in Christ is to abide in the way of prayer

Lord make the union closer yet
And let the marriage be complete

Bring me nearer to Thyself; help me in this trouble, sanctify to me this dispensation of Thy providence. Bring my soul more and more to feel its dependence upon Thyself, and give me grace to depend. The way of prayer is calling on God, waiting on God, waiting for God, committing all things to Him. The way of prayer is asking Him to come

- "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" The way of prayer is asking to be permitted, and enabled, to go to God, to obey the word - "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". Whatever the burden is, prayer says, Lord, I would cast it on Thyself. If it be your own personal burden, if it be the burden of the family, if it be the burden of some particular affliction, or bereavement, or sorrow, faith will say, take it to God, and prayer goes that way, and seeks power to cast it on the Lord. Prayer is given by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is promised to be the Spirit of grace and supplications, and when a man of God gets that Spirit, then He abides in Christ. He abides in Him in the way of prayer.

He abides in Him in the way of hope. A soul, cast down, says to itself - "Why art thou cast down?" "Why art thou disquieted?" "Hope in God". Hope, sweet hope, is as an anchor to the soul which entereth into that which is within the veil. This is a real abiding. Hope, real hope, given by the God of hope, hangs about God, waits for the realisation of God in the promise, and in the mighty working of the Holy Spirit.

There is an abiding in love. O what love prompted the answer of Peter in the name, both of himself, and his brother disciples, to Christ's question - "Will ye also go away?" "To whom shall we go, Thou hast the words of eternal life". And love says to the Lord - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". Are you happy without God's presence? Do you get on comfortably without God's presence? No. A living soul says, I cannot get on without Him. And, wanting Him, the soul goes to Him in prayer, and supplication, and says - "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" That is an abiding in Christ. Humbly cleaving to Him is abiding in Him. You would not walk in pride, would you? They that walk in pride God is able to abase - so He says. And now the soul humbly cleaves to Him. "To whom coming, as unto a living stone ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house" Another figure used to set forth the same truth. "Abide in Me".

"He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." Now this may be a trial to some of us; it is to me. When you look at your fruitlessness, and then put it beside this word- "He

that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit", what can you say? "The trees of the Lord are full of sap". (Psalm 104 v 16). They are planted in the house of the Lord. They are planted in grace, they are planted in Christ, in His love, in His death, in His goodness, in His Priestly intercession. And so they are "fat and flourishing". And this condition is "to show that the LORD is upright....and there is no unrighteousness in Him". (Psalm 91). If we look at two or three things here we may be benefited. If you look at the righteousness of God, the righteous character of God, as being connected with your fruitfulness; if you look then at your unprofitableness, at your sad resemblance to the barren fig tree; if you look at your lack of power, of faith, of hope, of zeal, of humility, and of all the blessed, sweet graces of the Spirit, what, O what sadness you will feel. When I look at these things, at myself, at what I have just quoted, and at this word, I can only say, I am troubled. O, the lack of resemblance to a flourishing branch, to a tree full of sap. This may try an individual, this may try a church. It may put us, as a church, to self-examination; put me, as a poor minister, to self-examination; and put you, as hearers, and as members of the church, to self-examination. Are we fruitful? Are we fruitful individually? Are we fruitful as a church? And are the godly members in the congregation - not members of the church - yet are they fruitful? Come and "let us search and try our ways". An easy profession may cover a barren soul; may be like a potsherd of dross covered with silver; a potsherd with silver dross. What a solemn thing. Now the remedy, the blessed fruitfulness that the people of God want to bear; we are told the root and cause of it in this word - "I am the vine". What is this fruitfulness? Is it not love to God? that love that separates a man from that awful, solemn word - "If any man love not the Lord Jesus let him be Anathema Maranatha" No middle way. Love in a saint may wax cold, but there is love. He may have left his first love, but there is love. O, but if love is warm, what will love do? It will care for the honour of Christ; it will cleave to His Person; it will keep as near to the cross as it can; it will plead the atonement, and love the atonement. It will look on the beauties of Christ, and seek again, and again, to be drinking into His Spirit, to be walking in His fear. That is what I think to be fruitfulness. The fruitfulness of real love, true love. O, it is a great thing to love Christ. It is against nature, fallen nature, this love is. It pleases

God. Christ pleased His Father and so does a saint when he loves the Lord Jesus, and cleaves to Him. Have you love to make you cleave to Him? When devils, when the world, when your nature, when self-interest, as it would seem, all rise up against Him, have you love enough to say, But I want Christ? I cleave to Him. Love enough to enable you to say, at times

How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away His fear

There is wisdom in love. God said of His people in Deuteronomy, when they were always wandering from Him - O that there were such an heart in them to consider their latter end. Wisdom is in love. Love and wisdom go together, and they say, You cannot be right without Christ in you. "I in them". He dwells in the heart by faith. His power is there, the power of His resurrection. His peace is there. "My peace I give unto you". And all this is fruitfulness. Humility is a fruit, a beautiful fruit. It is spoken of as a garment. "Be clothed with humility". It is set forth as that which God loves. The opposite of it brings resistance from heaven to a person. "God resisteth the proud". If any of us be walking in pride, we shall find in some way, if God loves us, that He resists us in the course of pride. Humility therefore must be a blessed fruit. We are told - "He giveth more grace". To whom? To the humble. Peace is a fruit. I create peace, and the fruit of the lips, God says. It is a sweet fruit, when you get His smile, like living sap flowing from the root into your soul. Then you find that zeal for the glory of God, is a fruit. Whatever touches the Person, and the honour, and the glory of Christ, and you see it, will touch you, and pain you. God is jealous for His people, and one fruit of His goodness in them is they are jealous for His honour. O, it grieves a sinner, a child of God, when the Lord is dishonoured. Rivers of water run down mine eyes, said the weeping prophet, Jeremiah. O that my head were a fountain, that mine eyes would flow down constantly for the glory of God being trampled under foot. You will then bring forth much fruit. Faith is a wonderful fruit. "O woman" - said the Lord Jesus to that great arguer, who

argued with Him - "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee as thou wilt."

Well, I must not continue. I would close with one or two remarks in the form of questions; questions which, while I put them to you, I put them to myself. And the first question is - Have we any evidence or proof in our own souls that we are branches in the living vine? Not, Have we united ourselves to a body of professors? but Have we any evidence, any proof, in our own souls, that God has united us to His Son by election. By quickening regeneration, by living faith, by mighty operations, brought us into a saving relationship to the Lord Jesus? If we have no union with God we can never be where He is. The second question is - Is the first question confirmed by any fruitfulness? You wont be Pharisees, if you have got real fruit, in saying "Yes". Take what I have named, take faith. Sometimes people believe that they have got faith, in spite of their unbelief. I would be glad if I were enabled, even this evening, to make some of you believe you have got faith. Faith in the bleeding Lamb. Faith in the cross of Christ. Faith in Him whom men, and nations, and kings despise. O, it is a great thing to have a grain of faith. Is there fruitfulness? - "Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit". The Apostle Paul took great notice of the churches and he was very pleased with the Colossians. He joyed when he beheld their order and steadfastness of their faith. And God notices it too. He said to one church - "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3 v 10).

Now brethren, I leave the matter. May the Lord help us. We are poor creatures, and if you feared, as much as I have, that you resemble the barren fig tree, you will have many, many fears lest you should be cut down, and many, many prayers that God would not cut you down in your barrenness, but cause the digging, and the pruning to bring forth fruit to the praise of His glory.