

# When I'm Gone ... you will bear much fruit

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our Bible reading this morning is from St. John, chapter 15, and it's on page 1083 in your pew Bibles. John, chapter 15.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me as I remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 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. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

[ 1 : 07 ] Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks to God.

Thanks, Ruth. Do please keep that Bible open. It's page 1083 in the church Bible, if you'd find that helpful.

Because it's really important as we look at this, that everything I say just comes from the text there. And we're in a series as a church looking at these chapters of John's Gospel.

You can find an outline inside the notice sheet that is a bit different to what I'm going to say. But the points will come on the screen. And we're going to pray. We're going to ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

[ 2 : 04 ] Let's pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, we pray that for the sake of your glory, you will be at work here now.

And open your word to our hearts. And open our hearts to your word. That we, abiding in the Lord Jesus, would bear fruit. We ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, Gareth Jones was in the news on Friday. Gareth Jones, guess where he was from?

He's a Welsh farmer. And he grows grapes in a vineyard in North Wales.

And he puts sheep fleeces down on the ground. And he says this is the silver bullet that British vineyards have been missing. The sun reflects off the fleeces, a bit like when you get a suntan when you go skiing.

And it helps ripen the grapes so you get good wine. So there is hope for Scotland, for Scottish wine.

We can get sun-dried tomatoes, stone-baked pizza, now fleece-ripened wine.

[ 3 : 12 ] But in Israel, they didn't need sheep fleeces to grow grapes. And we're asking this morning, why does Jesus use the relationship between a vine and its branches and the gardener as a picture for us of being a disciple?

Why does he do that? We're in a series in John's Gospel, looking at Jesus preparing his disciples for life after he's gone. It's the night before he died.

And one of the deep concerns for the disciples is, how on earth are we going to do this when Jesus has gone? How can we believe in him when he's not here?

How can we make him known to others so they would believe in him when we can't bring them to see him? What hope is there for the world when Jesus has gone? Well, our first point this morning is, we hear about the Father's project.

The Father is making a fruitful garden. So let's pick up Jesus' words in verse 1 again. Jesus says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

[ 4 : 17 ] That would have been an extraordinary claim for those first 11 hearers, the first apostles. Jesus picks up an image here that is a rich vein running right through the Bible to describe God's work in the world, his plan for creation.

Right back in Genesis chapter 2, we're told of God's good creation as a garden, the Garden of Eden. The world was a wilderness, but God planted a fruitful garden, a place with a river and four headwaters so that it could be fertile, and all kinds of trees are in the garden in Genesis 2. And God put the man he'd made in the garden to work it and to take care of it. And then Adam and Eve together were told to be fruitful. In other words, fill the earth, and as you and your descendants serve God obediently, and you cultivate the earth for him, the fruitful garden that you're in will expand across the world so that the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as God's image bearers are fruitful for him.

But they disobeyed God. They turned from God, and so they were banished from that fruitful garden into the wilderness of the world. And yet God's purpose is still to fill the world with a fruitful garden. So we see that image taken forward in the picture of God's chosen people, Israel, being a vine. And we see that in the Scriptures. We see it in Psalm 80.

[ 5 : 54 ] I wondered if we could just turn there. If you just turn with me to Psalm 80. It's on page 593 in the Church Bibles. I'll just give you a moment to find it.

Page 593. Maybe keep a finger in John 15. And Psalm 80 is a prayer written for the people of Israel to pray at the time of exile.

So it's describing how God rescued the people from Egypt where they were slaves, and he brought them into the promised land. But because they've rejected God, they've been expelled from the promised land.

So look at the imagery that's used. Look at verse 8. He says, And it describes the golden age of Israel.

Verse 10. The mountains were covered with its shade. The mighty cedars with its branches. Its branches reached as far as the sea. That's describing prosperous people of God living as God's vine and spreading out.

[ 7 : 09 ] So then speaking about the exile, in verse 12, the writer says to God, Why have you broken down its walls? So that all who pass by pick its grapes.

Bores from the forest ravage it, and insects from the field feed on it. And then the prayer. Return to us, God Almighty. Look down from heaven and see. Watch over this vine.

The root your right hand has planted. The son you have raised for yourself. Your vine is cut down. It is burned with fire. At your rebuke, your people perish.

Do you see what it's saying? Israel was meant to be the vine that God the gardener used to make the world a fruitful garden. And instead, it's been ravaged. And we know why.

It's because they turned from God. And so the prophet Isaiah uses this imagery of Israel as God's vine in God's vineyard to explain that their faithlessness and their fruitlessness meant that God rejected them and sent them into exile.

[ 8 : 13 ] I'll read verse 7. Isaiah 5 verse 7. Isaiah says, The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed, for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

But then God promised that after that exile, the day would come when there would be a future for God's vine. Isaiah 27. One day there will be a fruitful vineyard cherished and protected by the Lord. And in Isaiah 27, it says, The whole world will be filled with its fruit. So Israel, in Jesus' time, had really latched on to this picture of being God's vineyard.

And in Herod's temple in Jerusalem, which was the temple at the time, that the disciples would have walked past that very evening as they went to the Last Supper and as they left and went out to the Mount of Olives, in the temple there was a magnificent golden vine.

Could God put right this wilderness world through His people living righteous lives? Well then Jesus is there with His followers and He says, I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener.

[ 9 : 30 ] He's saying nothing less than I'm the true Israel. I have come to be the true people of God where Israel messed up. And more than that, Jesus is saying, I'm the one through whom God is going to put the whole world right.

He is going to put right this wilderness world and make it fruitful through me, Jesus says. God will make the whole world a fruitful garden through Jesus. It's an audacious claim, isn't it?

Consider how audacious that is of Jesus to say, I'm the true vine. And it's not just that He's using it as a picture to help us understand our living connection with Him, though it does that.

Jesus is also saying, the big thing that God is doing in the world all through human history, He will now achieve through me. I'm the true vine. And through His magnificent, righteous life and saving death and Him sending the Spirit to be in us and teach us and help us, Jesus can bring people like us into that work of God.

So that's our second point, the Father's plan. The Father's plan is that people bear fruit in Jesus. So let's pick things up again in verse 5 of John 15.

[10:46] John chapter 15, verse 5. Jesus says, I'm the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

So the fruit grows on the branches of the vine and the branches are first the 11 disciples and I take it through them and with them, everyone who believes in Jesus becomes a branch in the vine.

And it's a picture of a relationship with Jesus so close that there is oneness. We are one with Jesus. It's also a picture of dependence just as branches draw on the vine.

It's a picture of our spiritual life and vitality flowing from Jesus by His Holy Spirit into believers, the branches. And that continuous provision, that dependent relationship is a key thing for us to understand in being a Christian.

Let's remember that we are no better than Old Testament Israel by ourselves. So if Jesus was leaving for heaven and saying to His followers, when I'm gone, you are God's vine, we would fail.

[12:00] We'd be just like Israel. But He doesn't say, you are the vine. He says, I am the vine, the true vine. He is the channel through whom the purposes of God can be brought into the world by people like us being connected to Him.

Which means, if we want to be fruitful in our lives, if we want to do things in our lives that count for God and are valuable to God, things that have eternal value, we can do that if we abide in Jesus. What is the fruit that He's talking about? I think He has a broad description. He wants us to have a broad understanding of what that fruit would be.

A life lived to please God. So if we just look further down, the bit we'll look at next week, the next section, we see that clearly the fruit includes obeying Jesus. Verse 10, If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.

So it's about obedience. We heard Him say two weeks ago in John 14, If you love me, keep my commands. But it also includes joy in verse 11. He talks about our joy of knowing God personally and knowing His love.

[13:11] It includes loving other believers, so He commands that in verse 17. If you see there, this is my command, love each other. So as we grow in love for God's family, we are being fruitful for God.

It includes Christ-like character in Isaiah chapter 5, a concern for those who are in need. And the fruit must include making disciples of others.

For that's been such a theme in this section. As Jesus goes, He promises the Holy Spirit will help His first disciples to make disciples because the Spirit will remind them of Jesus' teaching so they can pass it on to others.

And we heard Jesus promise two weeks ago, His followers will do greater things than He did as we make Jesus known, living after His death and resurrection, to a world around us.

People all over the world are drawn in to believe in Jesus and that's the fruit of His disciples, of the branches. So we're fruitful for God when we grow in love for Jesus and obedience and joy and in making disciples by speaking God's word to others to help them grow.

[14:25] And this picture of us as branches for God's fruitful garden, I think it reshapes how we think about our Christian lives. We might think of the different areas of our life this morning a bit like different slices of a pizza that we can kind of divide up our lives like you would slice a pizza.

So we've got different slices of life. We've got working life. We've got friendships. We've got home life. Maybe we've got a hobby that we give our time to. And maybe one of the slices in our life is the Christian life.

Things we do for Jesus. Things connected with church, with the Bible, with prayer, with meeting other Christians, being in a growth group, that kind of thing.

And we might even look at those slices of our lives and think, you know, I'm doing a pretty good job of some of these slices, but that Christian slice, I'm just not very good at that. I just find it quite hard

to get that Christian slice of life on a good footing, especially when I come to it after I've tried to get everything else under control.

Well, what does Jesus' picture here show us about the Christian life? God wants the whole pizza. He wants the whole of our life to be fruitful for Him.

[ 15 : 47 ] And God can take the whole of your life and He can line it up with His big purposes for the world to make a fruitful garden. Being a Christian is about everything you do if you do it fruitfully for God.

And when you look to obey Jesus, to bear fruit for Him, it's not something that you kind of have to fit into life. It's the very thing that God made you for. Drawing others to see Him and believe in Jesus through the words you share about Him and the way you live for Him.

So how do we become more fruitful? Well, that's our third point. We've thought about the Father's project. He's making a fruitful garden and He will do it. We've heard about the Father's plan that people bear fruit in Jesus.

Our third point is the Father's process of growing fruitful branches. Let's look down at verse 5 again. Jesus says, 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. So what does Jesus mean when He says, apart from me, you can do nothing?

[ 17 : 06 ] I think that's quite a surprising thing to say, isn't it? Because if I separated myself off from Jesus, I can think of loads of things that I could do. But Jesus says, apart from me, you can do nothing.

I think He's got in mind the particular mistake we might make of being disciples and thinking that we can do things of value to God, fruit-bearing things, without Jesus.

God has a verdict on what we do without Him and whatever we think of it, that verdict is nothing. It is nothing. God is growing a fruitful garden and you're either in the vine bearing fruit for Him or you're a weed bearing fruit for yourself.

It's nothing to Him. An organic connection to Jesus is essential for a fruitful life. It's very black and white. So how do we abide in Jesus?

Well, first, Jesus gives us a reassurance that being a Christian starts with the work of God. Look at verse 3. He says, He assures them, verse 3, you are already clean because of the word I've spoken to you.

[ 18 : 20 ] So from the moment we believe in Jesus, that is, we trust Him and we trust that He will give us the gift of eternal life and forgiveness, the moment we do that, we are united to Him as a branch to a vine.

It's a work of God that we don't have to earn. And that assurance from Jesus in verse 3 invites each of us this morning to ask ourselves a searching, personal question.

Is that true of my own life? Have I really come to Jesus and put my trust in Him? It doesn't happen through baptism or through coming to church.

It's a real internal change of being given spiritual life, knowing God, because we come to Jesus and believe in Him. And whoever we are, we can do that and then we would hear the assurance of verse 3 that Jesus says, you are already clean because of His words.

God makes you clean. And having become a branch, how do we become fruitful? Well, when you speak to people about getting good grapes in a vineyard, there are two steps that are more important than any other.

[ 19 : 32 ] Once you've got the climate sorted, either with sunshine in Israel or fleeces in Wales, there are two key elements to running a successful vineyard.

The first is, you've got to have a good vine. You've got to have a good vine that's strong to nourish the branches. The second key thing you need is a good gardener, a good vine dresser, as they're called.

And the vine dresser is constantly busy cutting and pruning the branches. And we see that in Jesus' picture of God the Father. In verse 2, Jesus says of the Father, He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.

And He makes clear in verse 6 that that's about a personal choice that we might make not to abide in Jesus anymore. Verse 6, If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. So we picture now the gardener, God the Father, with His secateurs, seeing a branch on the vine and it's not bearing any fruit. [ 20 : 43 ] It's not got any life and He cuts it off and it's thrown onto a pile that will be burnt. And picture those first apostles, Judas Iscariot has just left.

Like them, he spent three years with Jesus but now he's gone into the night. Ultimately, he didn't remain in Jesus, he was like a fruitless branch.

And the implication for us today is that if you're a real Christian, if your faith is genuine in Jesus, there will be fruit to show for it in your life. There will be fruit for God, not for yourself.

And we ought to ask ourselves, is there some evidence today in my life of a living relationship with Jesus? That I depend on Him, that I trust Him, that I'm choosing to try and be fruitful for Him and not for myself in my life.

And if we're concerned there might not be that evidence today in our lives, Jesus urges us to draw near to Him dependently. We just have to ask Him to turn back around and ask Him to make us fruitful.

[ 21 : 57 ] And today would be a great day to do that in light of this teaching, to acknowledge afresh our dependence on Jesus. He warns us not to become a dead branch that would be cut off.

And if we are depending on Jesus, He doesn't command us to bear fruit. He says we will bear fruit. And the Father's ambition is to make us more fruitful.

So we come to the pruning, the second half of verse 2. In verse 2, He says, the Father cuts off every branch of me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

So if you picture yourself walking into a vineyard in Israel, you might walk in and there are vine branches all over the floor. There are bits of branch everywhere.

There's greenery everywhere. And at first you think, has this place been vandalized? Has someone broken in? But then you see the vine dresser and what looks like ruthless cutting and damaging is actually the care taken to cut back the growth of the branches so that the fruit comes out.

[ 23 : 07 ] We've got a vine in our back garden, incredibly, in Glasgow. And if you don't cut it back, the branches grow longer and longer every summer. It's a nuisance, actually.

Our neighbors find that our vine goes over the fence, onto their garage and over their garage roof. But if you cut it back in late summer, what happens is it stops growing over the fence and instead it grows the grapes.

It starts drawing on the vine again but it grows grapes instead of growing in length. Pruning is about cutting back for a loving purpose. And that's the picture of the Father's work in the life of a Christian. God is ambitious for us to bear fruit so he cuts us back so that we'll bear more fruit. How does he do that?

Well, we might think about our life situations, about providence, God's control of all things.

Sometimes we might feel like we're being cut back in the way that our lives are turning out as they are ordained by a sovereign God.

[ 24 : 17 ] God is teaching us through those situations to draw more dependently on the vine, on Jesus. But the surprise of this section, I think, is that Jesus wants us to see that the Father does his pruning through Jesus' words.

So let's just see that together, that theme. In verse 3, look at how we're first made clean or pruned in verse 3. He says, you are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

It's Jesus' words that make us clean, that first prune us. And then in verse 5, he talks about remaining in Jesus and I in you, but he changes the language in verse 7.

Look at that. He says, if you remain in me and my words remain in you. And that fits with what we heard in chapter 14, verse 10, where he clearly said that the Father, God the Father, is doing his work in the world through Jesus' words.

Through his words, the Father works. So this picture of God pruning his fruitful branches is a picture of the feeling as a Christian of being corrected by God's word, by scripture.

[ 25 : 33 ] As we come to the scriptures obediently and we let his word live in us, we feel God's word challenging us, correcting us, rebuking us, day by day in our lives.

And if we feel that, we can feel cut, we can feel it painful, realizing that we need to give up something that we love too much or we over-depend on or that we misuse.

Even this morning, we might be conscious of an area of our life where we feel a conviction that Jesus' words call us to change and we don't know if we'll be okay if we change.

But God's word is used by God lovingly to make us more fruitful. On the other side of the pain of being pruned by the word of God is greater fruitfulness.

And Jesus' teaching here gives us a different way to think about the Christian life and how change comes in the Christian life. If you think about an area of your life where you'd love to change, you'd love to be more godly, maybe you think about speech, maybe you're someone who thinks, you know, I wish my speech was less ungodly and more godly.

[ 26 : 45 ] Well, we can't change just by thinking about the behavior and thinking to ourselves, stop this, do that, stop doing that, do that. But the picture of the vine and the branches remind us that we can't bear good fruit on our own.

Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. Instead, we need to turn back to Jesus, the true vine, focus on him, focus on our union with him.

If we depend on him more and we're more prayerful to him and we let his words remain in us and live in us, then he assures us we really will bear much fruit.

We'll find that fruit just growing in our lives. too often my picture of Jesus is like he's a commanding officer and he sent us off on a mission without him to go on and live for him and do all these things for him and make him known and it's as though we have to report back now and again as to how we're going.

But Jesus says, you will do nothing apart from me and instead, his picture of the Christian life is of him being the true vine with us wherever we go so that we're always drawing from him and as we more consciously focus on that union with him, God's fruit will grow in our lives.

[ 28 : 10 ] Folks, our time is gone. Jesus says, I am the true vine. His picture reassures us. God has a plan for the world. He will make it into a fruitful garden.

His picture inspires us. God intends the whole of our lives to be fruitful for him and his picture invites us to remain in Jesus, to depend on him more consciously, to ask him, to listen to him so that through him God will make us abundantly fruitful.

He says in verse 8, this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. Let's pray for that together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you that you have a plan to take this wilderness world and fill it with a fruitful garden, even the fruit of lives lived for your glory.

Thank you that Jesus is the true vine and that through him you are already at work to fulfill that plan. Thank you that we've seen in the lives of Christians we know around us a glimpse of that fruit, the fruit of branches who are abiding in Jesus.

We pray for your help that you will help us to remain in Jesus, to draw strength from him more consciously, to pray to you more dependently, to hear his words in our lives more obediently, that in us you will grow much fruit for your glory.

[ 29 : 51 ] Amen.