



Voice Ministries

FRUIT OF THE VINE

Reading: John 15: 1 - 17

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me (John 15:4)

Generally speaking, in the Western world we are able to celebrate bountiful harvests, our lands being productive and providing us with an abundance of crops. In years where one particular harvest fails because of the prevailing climatic conditions, so we find that another crop produces abundantly, almost as if to compensate us. Add to this the filled shelves of the supermarkets and food stores, and it becomes difficult to empathise with people for whom crop failure is a regular occurrence, and means starvation and, quite possibly, death. In order to fully understand this you need to have experienced living in conditions of drought or flood. In drought conditions, for example, such shoots as appear will rapidly shrivel and die due to the shortage of water. Little is able to survive such conditions. Drive along a tarmac road in Africa at such times and you will experience the heat haze that surrounds you with a fierce intensity, your nostrils offended by the acrid smell of melting tar on the road, your throat parched from the dust that is stirred into the still air. At the roadside, as you drive by, you will see the carcasses and skeletons of animals that have given up, their bones picked clean, bleaching in the sun. occasionally you will see wild boar, kudu and gazelles, standing forlorn in the burning heat, waiting for the rain that may be another year away, hopeless and helpless in their desperation. People will walk miles every day to some dried-up river bed in order to dig down deep in an attempt to find enough water for another day. When you have experienced this first-hand and lived through it, then you can never forget the sights, the smells, and the eerie silence.

Yet, despite the plenty of the Western World, despite the richness of people's lives, this poverty is still allowed to exist. Water and food is wasted on a vast scale. Every day the amount of water allowed to waste away down drains from leaking pipes and taps, is enough to fill a lake. Every day the amount of food that is tossed aside into the waste bin would be enough to prevent thousands from starvation.

Our society believes it has a right to everything, and an even greater right to do what it pleases with the world's resources. Many people live in a world of declining morals, where ethics count for little. A world that has, in so many areas, turned its collective back upon the Creator, preferring to believe in the power of the Self, or of the Mystic, or of Nature itself. We have been pressured through the Media to believe in almost anything rather than the values that have been handed down to us through Scripture,



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from God Himself. We live materialistic lives where Greed, in the form of personal possessions, has become a god for many people. We often despise the unfortunate rather than seeking ways to alleviate their condition. The further they are down the scale of acquisition, so the more they are looked down upon.

Where are we that we seem to be unable to hear God's voice, speaking through His son Jesus Christ, ***This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you*** (John 15:12). And this is neither a suggestion nor an idle comment, **it is a command.** So often we find that true humanity, that which is seen to manifest love for one another, is borne out of poverty. It is from those that have so little in material terms that we are able to learn so much about sharing and giving, about caring and loving. We often hear cries about poverty in this country, yet it is *relative poverty*, which is a far cry from real poverty. How can you listen to cries of 'poverty' from people who feel that they are poor because they are only a one-car family, or because they don't have the latest or the biggest popular commodity, or because they can't afford to go on a luxury holiday? So often the people who complain live in subsidised accommodation, often own a car and the latest in electrical consumer luxury! People who constantly want more, only to discover that more so often means less in real terms. The real poor — those who really understand about poverty — no longer have the energy to complain, for all of their time is spent on existing, all of their energies channelled into surviving one more day. Not for them the luxury of television and take-away meals, of weekly cheques to help support alcohol and smoking habits. In parts of the world where people are born to live and die in poverty, there becomes a dignity despite the poverty, an attitude that surpasses the material surroundings, a caring for others that attempts to ensure that suffering is minimised.

John 3:16 teaches us that the love that God has for His creation is so great that He even gave up His only Son, Jesus Christ, so that mankind would be rescued from its sinful state ; that through the sacrifice of Jesus, mankind would be reconciled to God, that the gates of eternity would be opened to every person who chose to believe on Jesus Christ as their Redeemer. This shows the extent of His love for us. It also illustrates what Christ's commandment to love one another means. In John 15:13 Jesus clarifies and emphasises the point: ***Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.***

It is when we show our love for others by caring for them, and sharing with them that with which we have been blessed, that we show also our love for Jesus Christ and our love for God. As Christians we are brothers and sisters in Christ, and as such we can know God as our father too. In Christ we are bound to each other through His



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love, and it is this same love that will be the bond that reaches out to others. When we share with others, when we love them and care for them in His name, then we do not seek love for ourselves in return. Knowing that we have the love of the Father and the love of Jesus to sustain us is more than enough for us. So great is this love, that we will

have more and more of it, the more we share with others so the more that will be given to us.

It is this attitude that show our fruitfulness in Christian terms, we are like the branches of the vine. If we are selfish and self-centred then we will be fruitless, and we will need to be pruned in order to encourage us to become fruitful. If we don't respond to the pruning knife then it will be necessary for us to be cut out and discarded altogether. If we are useless then we will be simply discarded to shrivel up and be thrown on the fire. We may do various good works, but if we do not abide in Christ then they are worthless in kingdom terms. Like the dead, unproductive branches of the vine they will be gathered up and burned at the judgement seat of Christ. If we spend our entire lives doing good works from a sense of duty rather than from love then they will profit us nothing at all at the end (see 1 Corinthians 13: 2-3). It's only when we live for Christ, spending our time in obedience to His commands, only when we to live fully in Him is to die fully to self, it is only then that we will be really fruitful. When writing to the Philippians, Paul wrote: ***For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*** (Philippians 1:21).

It's through our fruitful labours that the message of the Gospel will reach out to others. It's when others see the effect that Christ has made in *our* lives that they will want it in *their* lives too. The love of God is not an impersonal thing, simply an overall love that encompasses everyone and everything in its view. It's a personal love, a love that reaches down from God to each one of us. It's ours, not by right but as a gift of grace from a caring Father. It is through it that we can fulfil our eternal purpose. We can grasp it tangibly in our hands and encompass it in our hearts simply by hearing the Word of God and by believing upon Jesus Christ as His Son, sent to rescue us from sin and lead us to salvation. Once we have grasped it firmly, understanding that the message is a personal one for us, then we can share it with others, knowing that as much love as we show to others so our Father will fill us always to overflowing with His endless love.

What about you? Do you **fully** know the Lord Jesus Christ as **your** personal Saviour. Do you know **beyond all doubt** that at the end of time on earth you will live on in Eternity with the Father and the Son? There will be no room for doubt if you **really believe in Jesus Christ**. It's only by the reality of your belief that He will be able to



abide in you, for how can He abide in someone who is uncertain of His existence within them? And it will be by His abiding in you that others will see His love in you, and will come to understand the gospel message that is equally personal to them, as they see for themselves the reality of Christ in your life.

Are you a branch of the vine that is bearing a rich abundance of fruit, or do you need to be pruned in order to become more productive. When the time comes for your fruit to be harvested will it be a time of plenty or will it be a time for despair? Only you can answer that, and only you can ensure that it will be the right answer, by the grace of God.

Amen.

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