

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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No: 79

"I am" sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel (6)

Jesus answered him, "I am the real 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.

Objective : To consider the privileges and challenges of living as part of the "real vine"

Brief expository talk on Jesus as "the real vine".

Read John 15: 1– 17

Introduction

There's a story told about Muhammad Ali, the former heavyweight boxing champion. He's the one who used to say simply, "I am the greatest". One day he was on an air flight when the passengers were told to fasten their seat belts. Seeing that Ali hadn't done so, one of the stewardesses asked him to fasten his belt. Ali replied, "Superman don't need no seat belt". To which the stewardess, brilliantly, responded, "Superman don't need no plane."

There's something shocking about someone making such extravagant claims about themselves -even if it's part of an act, or done in good humour, or even self-mocking. Yet what Ali claimed for himself was as nothing compared to the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. In doing so, he set himself apart from all normal religious leaders. CS Lewis famously commented, "there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him: 'Are you the son of Brahma?' he would have said, 'My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.' If you had gone to Socrates and asked, 'Are you Zeus?' he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, 'Are you Allah?' he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, 'Are you Heaven?', I think he would have probably replied, 'Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.'"

Yet Jesus consistently and repeatedly made claims which put himself, and not only his teaching, at the centre of spiritual reality, defining spiritual reality for us. And we have another such claim before us in this study.

As we examine what Jesus says, we'll see that he puts himself right at the centre of spiritual truth, life and productivity. The imagery of the vine still has significance for Christians today as it speaks of the privileges of belonging to Christ and the community of His people. It also speaks of the challenge that comes with this privilege.

Questions for discussion

1. What is the relationship between the true vine and the gardener? What is the relationship between the branches and the vine?

2. What is the primary purpose of the branches?

3. Jesus repeats "remain in me", "love", and "bearing fruit". How are these words related? What do you understand by God's pruning and by the warning in verse 6?

4. What type of fruit is being envisaged in this passage (consider vv. 10, 11, 12; Gal. 5:22)?

Note: The above examples are all the fruit of Christ, and we're not free to pick and choose. As if the vine branch could decide to grow apples, blueberries or mango instead of the grape. We're not let off witnessing if we're loving and joyful. Nor can we restrict ourselves to a kind of grim obedience - we're to be joyful and loving. It's not as if we can each sign up for a different group: the obedience team, the joy club, the witness brigade, the love family. The branches simply can't choose what fruit they'll bear. It's determined by the vine they belong to.

5. Consider this "I am" and its relationship to the other five that we have focussed upon. What have they taught you about Jesus in terms of His uniqueness, person and Mission? Is there a progression in the way Jesus revealed Himself?

6. What is the link between obedience and prayer (vv. 7, 16)?

Conclusion

If I'm a Christian, I will bear fruit. But, someone may say, surely we're saved, we're Christians because of what Christ has done for us, not because of what we do for him? Yes, that's true. And Jesus makes that very point in v3... We only belong to him because of his word spoken to us and dwelling in our lives. But, at the same time, the only evidence that we do belong to him and share the life he gives is that we bear his fruit.

Without Jesus, people are heading for a lost eternity in hell. Because Jesus is the only way to God remember. And so the most loving thing we can do for someone is introduce them to Jesus and the Gospel of salvation. We might not all have evangelistic gifts and it doesn't mean we all have to go door knocking. But it does mean that we all need to be bothered about evangelism; bothered about getting the Gospel out to the people we know personally as well as the rest of the people of North London. It means we'll be committed to reach out to new people. And so it means welcoming new people on an equal basis into the church and getting rid of any informal pecking order of who's been here the longest. It means not being threatened by changes that might be necessary to accommodate new-comers. It means being committed in prayer and in practice to seeing the church grow numerically as well as in depth of spiritual maturity. Because that's the fruit that Jesus is talking about in v16: fruit that will last for eternity. People becoming Christians and going onto demonstrate the reality of their faith by their growing obedience to God's word, His commands about godly living and mutual love. And His command to reach out with the Gospel to all types of people, not just traditional church goers.

But living like that is costly. But that's nothing compared to what it cost Jesus. Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.

We followed a crucified Lord who said: pick up your cross and follow me. Living a genuine Christian life is hard; sometimes it's very hard. And that's why we need love and support from each other. But most of all, we need's God's help. The help of the Holy Spirit living in us. So let's ask for that help now as we close in prayer.