

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Studies in John's Gospel - Jesus' Farewell Words - John 15**

About fifteen years ago, I visited a friend in the Channel Isles. He was a market gardener by profession. Over his lifetime, he developed and exported a variety of flowers and vegetables to the United Kingdom and mainland Europe. He certainly had a great store of knowledge about how to grow things.

After I'd been there a couple of days he said to me, "Come on, there's something I want to show you." He took me to his garden greenhouse. In it were two vines. One was really flourishing. Great clusters of choice grapes were forming on all the branches. The other vine was, relatively, a poor specimen. It was lagging well behind the first one, in both quality and quantity.

I wondered why it was that one vine was so prolific, and the other, reared in the same soil, in the same greenhouse, by the same horticulturist, was relatively unproductive. My friend grinned. He had obviously guessed what I was thinking. "Come with me," he said. He led me to a covered well, just inside the boundary of his land. He removed the cover and leaned over, pointing down into the semi-darkness. "Look," he said. When my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I was able to see some strong roots. They had broken through the stone retaining wall of the well, several feet below ground level, and then plunged downwards into the water which was quite a distance below. Here, then, was the secret. The vine that was thriving had been successful in its search for water. It was drawing constantly from that hidden supply well below ground level. The water was drawn from the well, through the main stem of the vine, into and through the branches, thus promoting the formation of luscious grapes in due course.

In John 15, the Lord Jesus used such an analogy to remind His disciples how much they needed Him. Furthermore, they could never live in a way that pleased God without and apart from their links with Him. He was indispensable to their spiritual well-being and progress. I am sure that most Christians who read their Bibles regularly will be conversant with the seven "I Am's" of John's Gospel. They give us seven statements of the Lord Jesus, using various metaphors to emphasise how vital it is for His followers to rely completely on Him for everything. In John 15, we get the last of the seven. "I am the True Vine." How graphic the picture is. The only channel for the transmission and promotion of health giving life is the flow of that life through the main stem into and through the branches. Any branch not in constant and living touch with the main stem will dry up and wither away. One thing is certain. No fruit would be produced. The only proper action would be to cut off the dead branch and dispose of it. Since the wood of the vine branch is not useful for any practical or decorative purpose, the only right course would be to burn it. All this is described in John 15:1-8. As we go through a few of the details, let us bear in mind the major lesson for us. This is the way real Christianity works.

We read in James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, from the Father of Lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." It is in keeping with this that verse 1 of our chapter says, "The Father is the husbandman." He has set the ball rolling. He is the originator of the process. It is only right that He should have something in return for all His goodness towards us. That is why the figure of fruitfulness is introduced. Verses 2, 4, 5 and 8 confirm this.

But our Father in heaven has not only originated the process. He has taken every necessary step, and provided every necessary means, to ensure that He will be fully satisfied with the final result. Romans 11:36 puts it this way, "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." To this end, any unproductive dead wood must be removed. Those branches which are productive must be purged, scrubbed clean, so that harmful bacteria which inhibit proper development are removed.

The application of the figure, and the agent that God uses for this cleansing process, is also made plain by the Lord Jesus. He said to His disciples, "Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." The necessity of regular cleansing had already been emphasised to the disciples in the feet washing episode described in chapter 13. There, too, it was with a view to their having what the Lord described as "part with Me," the enjoyment of constant communion with Him. In chapter 15, the same concept is termed abiding, abiding in His love, abiding in Him.

For the disciples, the feet washing was literal. Also, the Lord gave His word to them verbally. For us, the cleansing and purifying action of His word comes to us via the Holy Scriptures, as we read in Ephesians 5:25-26, "Christ...loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

From verse 9 onwards, the Lord Jesus leaves aside metaphorical language and speaks directly to His disciples. If we know Him as our Saviour, and claim to be His followers, the words are addressed to us also. Verses 9 to 17 tell us that the only way really to please the Lord, and indeed God, is by being completely obedient to Him and to what He says. The Lord summed it up in this way, recorded in verses 9 to 12: "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."

This is the argument He developed. When He lived here on earth, He lived in the constant enjoyment of His Father's love. In the joy of that, He was fully obedient to what the Father asked Him to do. The knowledge that living like that really pleased His Father led to a deeper, fuller enjoyment of that same love. The process was ongoing and ever deepening. As a man living on earth, He lived in the Father's love. He obeyed what the Father said. He enjoyed ever deepening communion with His Father in heaven.

The Lord invited His disciples to have the same kind of relationship with Him that He had with His Father. "As the Father in heaven has loved Me on earth, so is My love for you. When I go back to heaven, even more so. My love for you will be on the same pattern as My Father's love for Me while I have lived on the earth. I, in heaven, will really love you, on earth. By faith, it will be open to you to enjoy that love. My enjoyment of My Father's love led Me to be obedient to everything He said to Me. Similarly, if you really enjoy My love, you will be anxious to do exactly what I say. That will lead to an ever increasing sense of the reality of My love for you, even as in My case it led Me to enjoy My Father's love, more and more."

The Lord Jesus took the opportunity to take the process one stage further. "My enjoyment of My Father's love was the springboard for My love for you." "Similarly," He said, "your enjoyment of My love for you will become the springboard for your love for one another."

Of course, there is this difference. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, gave His Father very good cause for loving Him. He was perfect in all His ways. In contrast, the Lord's love for us is causeless. We don't deserve it at all. However, we show our appreciation for His causeless love for us in at least two ways. Firstly, we are to love one another in the same causeless way that He loves us. That is, not because others deserve our love, but because we want to follow the example set by the Lord Jesus, Who loved us when we least deserved it. Secondly, we show our appreciation of the Lord's love for us by being obedient to what He says. We become aware of what He wants us to do by reading our Bibles, the Holy Scriptures, day by day, and praying for help in understanding it and putting it into practice. As we sing with the children, "Read your Bible, Pray every day, And you'll grow."

Ah, there it is! The link between the first part of the chapter and the second! The Christian life is intended to be one of growth, development and fruit bearing, morally and spiritually speaking. This is described in these verses progressively as fruit, more fruit and much fruit. While we are thinking about it, the question arises, "What did the Lord mean when He was speaking about fruit, particularly in relation to His own life upon earth?" First of all, fruit is the end product, the whole purpose in mind in the cultivation of the vine. Grapes are sweet, grapes are pleasant, grapes are very pleasing to the palate. The Lord's application of this is very plain to see. When He lived on earth, there was fruit for His Father in heaven. As He Himself said, "I do always the things that please Him." (John 8:29). There could be nothing more pleasing to God the Father at that time than viewing the wonderful life on earth of His beloved Son, every step of which brought glory to God and blessing to mankind.

Jesus, the Son of God, has now gone back to heaven. Is it possible that God can now see anything on earth that will please Him in the same way as when His Son lived on earth? That is certainly His intention. But how, and through whom? Clearly, what Jesus is saying in this chapter is this. We are so to live, now, in the enjoyment of the love of Christ, and in obedience to His instructions, as given in the Bible, that Christ-like living will be procured. That will be observed and noted by God in heaven, and will be for His present joy. It will be like God looking down from heaven and seeing lots of Jesus-like behaviour happening all over the whole world, all the time. Surely, that will really please Him. That is put as the end product, that is, the fruit, of our enjoyment of the love of Jesus for us. And this does not only refer to our actions, things that we do. Our motives, our intentions, our thoughts, our ambitions, our manner of speaking, are all to be little pictures, illustrations and examples of the way the Lord Jesus lived when He was here on earth.

The Lord grants an added bonus to those who obey His teaching in this way. Let me quote from verses 14 and 15, "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you."

What a marvellous thing! If we obey Him (as we should and must, anyway) He will take us into His confidence and reveal His will unto us. Can it be done? Once we are committed Christians, can we switch on miraculous power to live

Christ-like lives that will please God in everything we think, say and do? Sadly, no. One of the most difficult lessons for us to learn is that, in ourselves we are no better, and we are no more able to please God, than before we trusted Christ as Saviour. Oh, you say, I thought that we Christians are completely changed from what we were before? Oh, yes, indeed we are. But, and it is a big BUT, in the mercy of God we are not cut adrift, and left to ourselves to get through this world, which is just as hostile to God as when they crucified our Lord Jesus Christ.

The third part of our chapter, verses 18 to 25, takes up this very point. When Jesus lived on earth, the world, that is, the rulers of the world, all hated Him. 'The rulers of the social world, the cultural world, the political world, the military world, the religious world, all hated Him. The more pure and holy He demonstrated Himself to be, the more they hated Him. Ultimately, they showed how extreme that hate was when they crucified Him at Calvary.

The Lord warns them here, "Don't imagine for a moment that the world will like you, if you live lives that remind them of Me. When I was on earth, they hated Me without a cause. Don't expect any better treatment than I got. In fact, the more like Me you are, the more the world will hate you. It's inevitable."

But, don't be disheartened. Oh, yes, the Bible means what it says when we read, "We are more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). But we must finish the verse. A part quotation will not do. "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." That's it! "Through Him that loved us." We shall never be able to be like Him, and live like Him, in our own strength. But He is able and willing to help us to do what we will never be able to do in our own strength.

How does He do it? 'The last two verses of our chapter, 26 and 27, let us into the secret. "But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning."

As in so many things, indeed in all spiritual things, in all aspects of Christian life and service, there is indeed only one power available. That is, the power of the Holy Spirit. Power to live like Christ. Power to please God. Power to witness for Him in this wicked world. Power to worship God. All found and available in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "I have to go away. I have to go back to heaven. But don't be too upset. I promise you that I will Send God the Holy Spirit to take My place. He will give you the spiritual power to please God and serve Him until I come back again. You won't be any worse off. In fact, spiritually you will be better off." No wonder the scripture says, not only "we are conquerors", but "we are MORE than conquerors, through Him that loved us."

The same promise applies to us. In ourselves, we are incredibly weak, and feeble, and unreliable, and inconsistent. But the Lord has promised to make power available for whatever we need, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us take courage, then, and seek to live Christ-like lives. Let us live for Him, and our God without distraction, till Jesus comes. I love the words of Ida S Taylor:

*In truth and grace I want to grow  
Like Jesus, day by day;  
And scatter sunshine where I go,  
Along my pilgrim way.*

*I want to live a life of love,  
Like Jesus, day by day;  
And point some soul to heaven above  
Along my pilgrim way.*

*I want to do some kindly deed  
Like Jesus day by day;  
And for His kingdom sow the seed  
Along my pilgrim way.*

*Like Jesus, like Jesus,  
I want to be like Jesus;  
I love Him so, I want to grow  
Like Jesus, day by day.*

God grant that we will have the grace and courage to live like that, in a way that is so like Jesus, that it pleases God, and witnesses to His saving grace. Amen.

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