

HARDSHIP AND DISCIPLINE, JOHN 15, HEB12:4-11

Lessons from the Vine #1

◆**Intro:** Grandpa and Grandma Meyering, my mom's side, lived in Modesto, CA. I have nostalgic childhood memories of their place in the early 1970's. I see a free-standing, brick grill and chimney on one side of the back patio. This was the place of family reunions that we "had to have before Grandpa died". Mom said that every year. I'm pretty sure Grandpa's still alive. We'd grill the catfish we caught with Gramps at the fish farms, and the chicken we plucked at my uncles ranch outside town. But what I really want to tell you about is the grape vine, meandering along a trellis that stretched from the separate garage outback, to the porch on the old stucco house. It had curly little tendrils reaching out like miniature wooden springs that had once wanted to grasp something, but had long since dried up in midair. There were, not often, but sometimes at least, dark purple grapes covered with a white dust. Sometimes they actually tasted ok. Mostly as long as I knew the place, there was just leaves and branches.

◆Does your life ever feel like just leaves and branches, and maybe not so many grapes? Mine does. And I suppose many others have felt it too. Sometimes you get up and you think to yourself, "Where is this all going? Why do I get up? I keep living the same things, and that'd be one thing if it were all GOOD things! But I keep making the same mistakes. I keep wanting the same wrong things. I wonder if I make any difference. Would anything be missing if I

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went missing?" Stuff like that. I call that branches and leaves, minus the fruit.

◆1. Did you know that **God wants your life to be fruitful?**

◆"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last." John 15:16, NIV.

◆"*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" *Ephesians 2:10, NIV.*

◆This may come as a surprise to some, because many assume that God isn't interested or paying any attention to the people - branches that are growing on the earth. Or they think he just *uses* branches in passing for his own pleasure, never mind what care they need to actually produce grapes -like a flippant little grandchild who picks the unripe grapes off the vine and throws them at their cousins. (I promise you it was my cousin Robbie's idea!)

◆A. But let's get a proper picture of God, shall we? Verse 1 says God is the vinedresser. Jesus is the vine, which is actually the trunk, growing out of the ground and standing around three to four feet high. You and I, pay close attention, as followers of Jesus, are the branches. The grapes are our good works, deeds, dispositions, affects in the world. Now it's the branches in this parable that get all the attention, isn't it?! They are carefully tied to the trellis, pruned when necessary, propped up with sticks to

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let air circulate and to keep the leaves in the sunshine. Which means then that one of God's aims on this earth is to bring good fruit of our the lives of his disciples. This is one of the primary ways he displays his glory and love!

◆ *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:8, NIV.*

◆ B. God's aim is that his followers lives are fruit-full. He does not want his children's lives to be aimless, empty, unrewarding, blahzeh. There are several kinds of fruit that the Scriptures speak about in a believers life.

◆ 1) The fruit of good deeds. "And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful". (Titus 3:14, NASB).

◆ 2) The fruit of good dispositions and aspirations. We also call these the fruit of God's Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22, 23, NIV. Compare that with the fruits of disregarding God.

◆ "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that

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those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21, NIV.

◆ Which life sounds better to you? No contest right? Wow, you say, “God wants my life to have all that!? But I have so much of the other list!” Seems like a pipe dream, doesn’t it. And that, my friends, is exactly how the disciples were going to feel in just a matter of days. You see, Jesus spoke all these things to them just hours before he was arrested and killed. So within days they were going to be doubting all the “fruit of the spirit” stuff, and be on the verge of wondering what difference and fruit of “good deeds” makes in this painful world. And that’s also why we’re talking about it now. This is reassurance from our Savior that a life connected, “remain”ing in him does bear fruit that honors God.

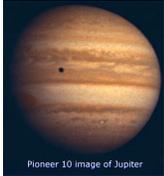
◆ I’ll bet you have days when you look at your life and wonder about the fruit. You think to yourself, “Yeah fruit is for people like Billy Graham or Mother Teresa. But not for Joe-Ordinary Guy like me. It’s not true. God is the gardener. Jesus is the vine. We just gotta stay connected. Hey even small things can lead to great things.

◆ For example. This is Pioneer 10, and one of it’s engineers... (**show pix**). Actually, here’s a better



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one...(show pix). NASA launched it in 1972 with a mission to reach Jupiter and send back photographs of it and its moons, and to take readings of its magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. (Show Jupiter) It did all that and more. Swinging past Jupiter in Nov. 1973 this probe was hurled by the planet's gravitational pull toward the edge of our solar system. At one billion miles from the sun it passed Saturn. At two billion miles it passed Uranus and Neptune at three billion miles. It was the first probe to leave our solar system and kept sending back signals until we lost communication in 2002, thirty years after its launch. What's most remarkable is that all those signals emanated from an 8watt transmitter, which radiates as much power as a bedroom nightlight, and it would take more than 9 hours for the signals to reach Earth. All that fruit from such a small thing, made by man just by being connected. Just think what God can do with you!

◆2. Ok. Second thing. If fruit is what God desires and intends for my life, why is it that it doesn't seem to be growing? Good question. Many believers still feel very unfruitful. There can be several reasons, the first of which appears in our text. **Fruitfulness comes along with righteousness.** (Back in the 70's when Pioneer 10 was launched "righteous" meant "cool". A jacked up Duster with

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mag wheels and oversized tires blows by and someone would say something like, "Whoa, righteous, dude!" We're not talking about "coolness" here.) Righteousness is becoming like Christ. The more I become/behave like my savior, the more God can use me to bear fruit. The more I say no to ungodly opportunities, thoughts, etc. and YES to godly(good) acts or deeds, the more I experience the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, etc.

◆A. What is a righteous choice? What is righteousness? It is simply doing the next right thing. Or living rightly. But what is the standard I use to measure right? Well, righteousness refers to good acts by God's standard, not mans.

◆When I sin, fruit shrivels. We really shouldn't be surprised. When we obey, we flourish even in hard times.

◆He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. (Psalms 1:3, NIV).

◆Who's "he"? Verse 1-2 tell us: the man who doesn't follow wicked counsel, and the man who chooses God's way or law.

◆B. You might have noticed that righteousness is not an automatic thing, not even for followers of God. It takes

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attention. And God is out to give us the attention we need. Let's take a look.

◆ In John 15:2 the NIV says "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." The KJV says "takes away." We assume that it refers to judgment. But wait a minute. This is a branch "in me" says Jesus. This is not an unbeliever going to judgment and missing heaven; someone not "remaining in Jesus". Now Ananias and Saphira were believers who God struck dead for lying. That could be what this verse means; if a Christian isn't producing righteous fruit, he or she gets taken out of the way. It's possible, but there's a better understanding.

◆ The primary root of the verb "cuts off" is the greek term ἀίρω, which means to lift up, as in picking up a puzzle piece that fell on the kitchen floor. A branch that doesn't bear fruit gets lifted up. So the image here is not necessarily the removal of a nonproductive branch, but of a branch being tended. As one vineyard worker explained "new branches have a tendency to trail down and grow along the ground. But they don't bear fruit down there. When they grow along the ground the leaves get coated in dust. When it rains they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless." So what does the vineyard worker

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do? The "gardener"? He goes through the vineyard with a bucket of water and washes off the dirty branches and "lifts them up" (airo), tying them to the trellis so that they thrive. He is disciplining them, isn't he?

◆ This is exactly what God does with us, his children, those "in Christ". Sin is like dirt on grape leaves. Air and light can't get in. The branch languishes and bears no fruit. God doesn't throw his kids away. He washes you off, and lifts you up. Sometimes it's through hardship! The Bible calls that discipline.

◆ *"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" Hebrews 12:4-7, NIV.*

◆ So if you are a believer and you feel like you are unfruitful, a beginning question is: Is there any dirt on my leaves? Am I dragging on the ground anywhere that is keeping me from a fruitful life? If you are an unbeliever bothered by the

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same kind of unfruitful life, the questions is the same. And the only way to get washed is by accepting the death of Jesus for your sins. Start there and you will become a branch of Christ. But believers too can become unproductive and a good early step is to repent of sin, confess it to God, and ask for cleansing. Make it a daily habit.

◆**Conclusion:** You see friends, sin can be a major cause of an unfruitful life. So ask God to reveal anything you need to make right with him. God is a good father. He always disciplines and washes us out of love. When a father cares, he deals firmly with the son or daughter. It's not always fun for us, but he is tying us to the trellis so that we produce good fruit. We only experience the pain of discipline (or unfruitfulness) as long as we hang on to our sin. Blessing comes from facing and confronting our sin, not hiding is down in the dirt. Hebrews 12:11 says

◆“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:11, NIV.

◆That word “harvest” is literally “fruit”!