

## **'The Importance of Keeping in Touch'**

26 Jun 2016

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**PP** John 15:1-8 & 16-17

One of the questions most people have is - If there is a God, how does He speak to us?

Last week we saw from the book of Romans that **God shows Himself to us** through his wonderful creation.

**PP** 'For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and the sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature.' **Romans 1 v 19 & 20.**

This is certainly true. When we look at, and think about our created world, we can say that God speaks to us through creation. If we listen we can hear God communicate to us, that He is the Creator.

**PP.** As you know we had the privilege of being in Japan, doing what is called 'Church Planting'. In fact, last Sunday was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one church we had a part in starting, in 1976. The church is called 'Asunaro Gospel Church'. 'Asunaro' is the Japanese word for a tree that grows in the region, and is a symbol of hope.

During the years, we had many experiences of seeing God speak to people. One time I remember well. It was on a still cloudless night. I was walking home from the church with a lady who wanted to meet Doreen, so we invited her to have supper with us. As we walked, I looked up at the stars, and said how wonderful I thought it was, that the God who loves us, made all we see in the universe. She too stopped and looked up.

The next moment the lady was crying, because she had never thought of such a thing. To hear for the first time that there was a God who created the world, and loved her, was a new and very impacting thought. God had spoken to her through what He had made, and she had in a way heard God speak. Why - because she wanted to know the truth about God. She was seeking.

On the other hand, one day I asked a local florist if she had ever thought about God as Creator by looking at all the beautiful flowers she sold each day. She answered 'no'. That was a strange thought for her. God was showing His glory through the flowers but she could not hear a Creator speak through His creation.

However, as you know, God does not only speak through His creation, but He also speaks through His Word the Bible.

**PP** Hudson Taylor the founder of the China Inland Mission in 1865, now known as OMF International, said: **God is alive, He speaks through His word, and He means what he says.**

Five or so years after we handed that first church over to Japanese leadership, and had served elsewhere in Japan, we were in NZ. Our two girls were finishing High School and planning to go to university. As some of you know I had been working for Honda NZ for 18 months, at that time. We had been asked to return to Japan for a leadership role, but I was wanting to know if it was God's will for us at that stage. Many of our well - meaning friends has given us many reasons why they thought we should stay in NZ, after 20 years in Japan.

**PP** One Sunday morning at church, the minister was taking communion and spoke from **John 15:1-8**. As I read the passage I found myself reading on to **verse 16** which is: 'You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will

give you whatever you ask for using my name.'

As I read it, God clearly spoke to me, and said Warren return to Japan and trust me to allow you to bear fruit. The next day I handed in my resignation to Honda NZ, and we began to prepare to return to Japan. God had spoken and we needed to obey. The next six years in Japan were some of our most challenging, yet fruitful years in Japan.

Over 2000 years ago Jesus gave this same word (**John 15:16**) to a group of his disciples. Men who had left everything to follow him, and needed to know how to be successful in God's Kingdom.

**PP** Jesus tells his disciples **3 things about why he chose them:**

1. **Appointed to go** – they were given the divine authority of God to tell others about Jesus. In other words they were to be His representatives, His ambassadors. In **Matthew 28 : 18 – 20** he expanded this to include teaching and baptising of all people groups.
2. **Produce lasting fruit** – To understand this, we need to look at what Jesus said in **verses 1-8 of Chapter 15**. We will look at that in a minute.
3. **Experience answered prayer** – In **verse 7** Jesus had already given them this promise. However, this was a conditional promise - **'If you remain in me and my words remain in you.'** Sadly some people see God like a vending machine. In Japan they are everywhere and we even had one at the end of our street that sold eggs in small bags of 10. Put the money in, pull the door open and take the eggs. I used to love hot coffee from these vending machines when travelling between trains.  
Jesus word to the disciples was **'remain in me'** – Stay close, keep in contact, talk to me, love me as I love you, and have my words in your hearts, never forget my teaching, study and read my words. Love the Bible and memorise it. Stay within the magnetic field of God's Love and you will experience answered prayer for my glory. (illustrate with a magnet)

**PP** So Jesus was telling his disciples to:

- **Follow Jesus**
- **Communicate with Jesus**
- **Take Jesus's words as your spiritual food**
- **Use Jesus name**
- **Love each other**

To understand this teaching of Jesus in more detail we need to look at the first part of **John 15** and in particular verses **1 – 8**.

Because of time we will not be able to cover all that Jesus teaches in this wonderful passage but I do hope that what we do learn will cause you to go and study this passage in more detail.

**PP** Today I will focus on two things: The fruit, what it is, and the quality and quantity of that fruit.

I am sure we all want to live productive and successful lives?

What does such a life look like? Well, according to Jesus it is a life that does three things:

1. **It is a life that produces fruit v2 – A purpose for living**
2. **It is a life that produces much fruit v5, 8 – A life that has quantity**
3. **It is a life that produces lasting fruit v16 – A life that has quality**

God's purpose for our lives is that we remain in close contact with Jesus as I have explained. Believe, obey, follow, soak ourselves in God's Word, pray in Jesus name and love each other as Jesus loved us. This is how we remain in Jesus.

**PP** This is why in verse 5 Jesus said '**Apart from me you can do nothing.**'

We can be successful in the world and gain money and power but be like a poor beggar in God's Kingdom. We can be spiritually poor.

Having the blessing and the ability to produce fruit by leading other to believe in Jesus, by being a disciple maker **does not depend on our skills and passion but on Jesus power flowing through us.**

**PP** That is why Jesus said in **verse 1**, "I am the true vine, my Father is the gardener"

In Jesus's day the Jews considered themselves to be God's only chosen appointed people. In one sense it is still true.

**Isaiah 5:7** says: The nation of Israel is the vineyard of the Lord of Heaven's armies. The people of Judah are His pleasant garden.."

**Now Jesus says " I am the true Vine"**. The Jews are God's chosen people, but according to verse 2 those who did not believe and follow Jesus, those who did not produce fruit, were cut away.

We all know this is a basic principle of care of a vineyard. If you do not cut and prune a vine, it will not produce a healthy and abundant crop.

In our garden we have a Feijoa tree that I had to cut branches off and prune others before it produced a good crop of fruit..

**PP** Now it is important to see why in **verse 1** Jesus calls his **Father ' the gardener'**.

The gardener is the one who cuts and prunes and the one who cares for the vine.

**Jesus is the true vine, his Father cares for him and through Jesus the Holy Spirit produces fruit in and through Jesus followers.**

Looking at the size of the Christian Church today, I would say a lot of quality fruit has been produced and is still being produced today.

The fruit has remained as promised in **verse 16**. Praise God!

**PP** Now, according to **verse 4** (read) we see that there are two actions taken by the gardener.

1. **Firstly, cutting off branches that do not produce fruit and burning them.** This part of the vine had such poor wood that the vineyard owner could not use it for making anything so just burned it.
2. The **second** action mentioned in **verse 4 is that branches that do bear fruit are pruned to produce more fruit.** This is a common practice for most fruit bearing trees. So the difference between the two branches **is their ability to produce fruit.**

So in practice what does this actually mean?

Does it mean I have to live in fear that God is going to come and cut me away because I am not useful for him and not producing fruit? No of course not! God is not going to do that.

However, when by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and by your reading of the Bible, you realise there is something in your life that does not please God then we are responsible to confess that sin and repent.

We need to exercise our free will and choose to follow Jesus.

Useless branches that are cut away, are not Christians who fail or sin.

**PP Branches that were cut and burned were firstly the Jews who did not believe, and secondly people of all nations who hear God's word but refuse to believe and follow Jesus. They are people who worship creation rather than the creator.** They worship the things the 'Maker' made rather than the one who made the things.

In the New Testament 'unbelief invites disaster'. These branches are cut away completely.

But for the Christian from **verse 2** it is clear that not all branches are cut away, some are just **pruned**. Why? So they will **produce more fruit**.

God is given the glory when his people produce a good crop of fruit and good quality fruit.

### **V8 True disciples of the true vine produce much fruit.**

The meaning of this comes clear when we read **verse 3**. Here, Jesus tells the disciples something that is so exciting and wonderful that if we grasp it, this truth will change our lives.

**PP V3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you, or 'the word I have given you'**

When you have a grape vine there are three essential things for a good crop.

- 1. Good pruning of fruit bearing branches**
- 2. No useless branches on the vine**
- 3. Clean soil for the vine to grow as a healthy fruit bearing vine.**

Those who care for vines know that if there are impurities in the soil that will affect the vine and the quality of the fruit. That's why Jesus says his Father is the gardener. The perfect sinless creator God cares for the true vine Jesus and the fruit produced is good.

Jesus said that we would know people by their fruit. Good trees produce good fruit. Bad trees produce bad fruit. When he said this he was referring to the religious leaders of his day. These people were cut away.

**PP True disciples are pruned so the Holy Spirit (like sap) can flow and produce quality fruit.**

- 1. These people lead others to Christ** and so grow the church in numbers.
- 2. They also produce fruit that has particular qualities.**

These qualities are found in **Galatians 5:22 -23 The fruit of the Holy Spirit:** (read) love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self- control. These are the qualities of those who abide in Christ and are disciple makers.

In **verse 3** Jesus tells his disciples that because they have believed and followed Jesus they are already pruned and purified by the word Jesus has spoken to them!

The pure Word of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is like the sap in vine. It gives life, protects the vine from disease and so the vine produces good fruit.

**PP Psalm 119: 11 'I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you** gives us an insight into this process.

Vines and branches **don't struggle to produce fruit** when they are planted in pure soil. They **naturally** produce good fruit. Christians with their spiritual roots deep in God's Word naturally produce fruit.

We should not struggle to produce fruit.

Store God's Word in our hearts. **Matthew 4:4** 'Man does not live by bread alone but by every word the comes from God'

**PP** All we need to do it what?

**v 4, 5 & 7 Remain in Me**

**Dwell in Me - Live in Me (and I will live in you) – being vitality united to – make yourselves at home in My love.**

**PP** In the early years of the history of the China Inland Mission, **Hudson Taylor** really struggled. His struggle was that not many Chinese came to Christ and the more he tried to lead the mission, which at that stage was in the hundreds of missionaries, and the more he

tried to think of good ways to reach the Chinese the more he struggled and became quite depressed. He began to think of all the things in his life he needed to get right with God and searched his soul for sin in his life that may displease his Heavenly Father.

Remember at the beginning of this message I told you how he said "God speaks through His Word, the Bible". Well, in his desperation to be a clean, pruned person for Christ, one day Hudson Taylor went for a walk across the rice fields of central China. As he walked and searched his own heart, God spoke to him. God spoke through **John 15:3**.

"You are **already** clean"!!!

**At that moment he knew the answer. No more struggle, no more depending on self, and human effort. Just rest in Christ, know you are pruned and clean, and trust God to produce the fruit naturally.**

In 1949 when the CIM was forced from China there were about 1 million Christians. Today it is estimated that it is more than 100 million. Fruit that has **quantity** and more importantly good fruit that has **quality**. In fact the Chinese government had a book written about Hudson Taylor. The book was called 'The Man who loved China'.

Have you been struggling as a Christian?

Rest in what Jesus has done.

Allow God to gently prune your life. Respond to His leading each day.

Rejoice that when he does prune, He wants to make you someone who will produce lasting fruit and someone who receives answers to prayer that glorify God.

**PP Read verse 8. 'When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father'**

**PP** Hymn – Jesus I am resting.... Remain in me.

Jesus! I am resting, resting  
In the joy of who you are;  
I am finding out the greatness  
Of your loving heart.

Simply trusting you, Lord Jesus,  
I behold you as you are,  
And your love, so pure, so changeless,  
Satisfies my heart,  
Satisfies its deepest longings,  
Meets, supplies its every need,  
Covers me with blessings,  
Yours is love indeed.

Always look upon me,  
As I work and wait for you;  
Resting beneath your smile, Lord Jesus,  
Earth's dark shadows flee.  
Brightness of my Father's glory,  
Sunshine of my Father's face,  
Keep me ever trusting, resting,  
Fill me with your grace.