



The beauty of Jesus

Galatians 5:22-23

Fruit of the Spirit - John 15

Sunday October 6th

Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers

Payne Stewart—a changed man

Payne Stewart was a flamboyant American golfer who won eleven PGA Tour events but whose life was tragically cut short in an airplane accident, at the age of 42. Not long before his death he became a believer, and, especially the press, noticed a change in him. This is what his local newspaper reported, “...everyone who knew or followed Payne Stewart noticed a difference in him the year before his death. The golfer who once snapped at autograph seekers, berated reporters and pulled a few not-so-tasteful practical pranks had, it appeared grown up. At first, it was hard to know where Stewart's newfound peace came from... (the reporter then gives some of the suggestions people were making - like attending a public relations class or just growing up, but the reporter continues) “The WWJD bracelet on his wrist became the tell-tale sign...” (WWJD stands for “What Would Jesus Do?”) Stewart Payne had become a follower of Jesus Christ, and without trying, but automatically and supernaturally, his whole life and character began to change. Another onlooker remarked on his changed life priorities: “Faith first, family second, himself third.”

Payne's story is the universal story of every single person who has been converted to Christ: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) The change is so dramatic that the person can be likened to a brand new creation!

Another common way the Bible describes the changes that happen is with the analogy of bearing fruit: the new tree or branch bears good fruit: “...every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” (Matthew 7:17-18) Before we have the Holy Spirit living within us, we can only produce bad fruit, but when Jesus Christ comes to live within us by his Spirit, then we have a new divine source of life and power, which automatically expresses itself in big changes. There are two great examples of this idea in the Old Testament.

The first is in Psalm 1, where the blessed man who avoids wickedness and meditates on God's Word is likened to “a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” (Psalm 1:3)

The other example is the nation of Israel, whom God called a vine. “God brought a vine out of Egypt; he drove out the nations and planted it.” (Psalm 80:8) God was expecting grapes from his vine, but no such joy; Israel bore no good fruit and turned out to be a worthless vine, according to Ezekiel 15. In the New Testament, this way of describing the effect Christ has upon his follower continues and reaches its highest note in Galatians chapter 5 and verse 22, the key verse for the rest of this term: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal 5:22)

Until Christmas, God-willing, we're going to take a deeper look at each of these nine fruits, which all together describe the character of the Lord Jesus himself, and then by his Spirit living in us, describe the character transformation of every true follower, over time. But because you and I city-dwellers tend to live away from the ground and away from the agricultural way of life, we're going to start this series with the words of Jesus in John 15, which take up this great idea of a Christian bearing fruit. Jesus' words in John 15 will help us to understand this “bearing fruit” idea, and especially,

the power behind bearing fruit, which is “union” and “communion” with Jesus Christ; being united to Jesus Christ in the first place, and then living in daily communion with him.

We find four main elements or characters in this teaching-story Jesus told. There is the Vine, the Branches, the Gardener (the man who prunes the vines) and then there is the fruit itself. Let’s work our way through these four:

#1 The True Vine is Jesus

Who is the Vine? “I am the true vine”, says Jesus in verse 1. Jesus is talking to his eleven remaining disciples during his last meal on the night before his crucifixion. Judas has left the room to organise the betrayal of Jesus. Jesus is teaching and comforting his remaining and true eleven disciples; he is speaking to all true followers this morning. And the very first thing he tells us in this agricultural illustration is that He is the Vine, the source, the power of all life. Why does he call himself the *True* Vine? Because his disciples knew from their Bibles that Israel was “the vine” which God transplanted from slavery in Egypt into the promised land; and they knew that it did not bear fruit! Jesus is boldly declaring himself to be the real thing, the *True* Vine! He is the fulfilment of Israel. Where Israel failed to bear fruit to God’s glory, Jesus will succeed!

#2 We are the branches

...but here is the amazing thing! You and I are described as the branches! Jesus, the Vine, chooses to bear fruit through us! “*I am the vine; you are the branches*” (verse 5) Grapes do not grow directly on the vine; they grow on the branches, which grow on the vine. Jesus chooses us to be the ones who bear fruit, he chooses us to bear his influence, his grace, his love, his Gospel to the world! He could so easily bypass us and directly bless the world without us, could he not? But no, he says, you are the branches on which my fruit for the world will grow!

Christ has no body now on earth but yours;

no hands but yours; no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world.

Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good.

Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people.

We may quibble about a word here and there, but the sentiment is true: Jesus has chosen to continue his mighty work through his people. We are the light-bearers, the salt-shakers and the fruit-bearers! What a privilege and responsibility! Jesus wants to bear good fruit in this world, and he has chosen us to be the ones through whom it grows, “I am the Vine and you are the branches.” Three truths flow from this astounding truth, that you and I are the branches:

First, a fact: if branches are to bear fruit, they must be connected to the vine in the first place. How are we connected to Jesus? Through faith! When we believed in Jesus Christ we were united to him in his death and resurrection (Romans 6) - the benefits of his death, which is the forgiveness of our sins, flowed over to us, and the benefits of his resurrection, which is new life, flowed over to us. This is what baptism signifies.

Are you connected to Jesus Christ? Do you believe he is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, your Saviour? Well then, by God’s grace, you are connected to the Vine! Do we always feel connected to the Vine? Not necessarily? But we live by faith, not by feelings! What does God say, what does he promise? “*If you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.*” (Romans 10:9) If you have confessed Jesus is Lord, and believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, you are saved: God has promised it and we believe it! We must not rely on our feelings but believe the sure promises of God!

Sometimes when I am doing the dishes or cooking, I scroll through the “God channels” on the radio in my kitchen to hear some Christian music. Can I tell you that I am sometimes disappointed by what I hear? Why? Because so many of the modern songs are about human feelings which go up and down, (“I love you God,” “I am so happy Lord,” kind of lyrics) rather than being about God’s certain promises which never change. What will feed our souls and encourage us

along the way, are songs that are about God and the solid promises he has made. (I just flip the back to Classic FM and listen to Beethoven, Schubert, or the sound track of Schindler's *List* or *Ladies in Lavender*!)

Do we always feel united to the Vine? Not necessarily, but if we believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who came into the world to die for our sins, and was raised on the third day to give us new life in this world and the next, we are in Christ, a branch connected to the vine.

A second truth that arises from the fact that we are the branches is that branches get everything from the Vine. Every single nutrient and every drop of water comes to the branch through the Vine, "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." (v.4), or most empathically, "Apart from me you can do nothing." (v.5) Not "some things", "no things."

Is this not one reason we fail so often? We forget that without Jesus Christ we can do absolutely nothing good. We perhaps subconsciously divide up things we can do on our own and things we need to seek God's help about. We can drive the car and do the washing and bring up the kids and do our day jobs without Jesus, but when it comes to spiritual things, church things, well of course we need to ask God for help? It's easy to divide life up like that - stuff we must pray about and stuff we can do on our own. But Jesus says, "apart from me you can do nothing." Perhaps this is the main lesson the Lord wants to teach someone through this sermon: you can't do anything without Christ.

Since branches have no life in themselves, since we draw everything from the Vine, a third truth follows: branches must remain in the Vine. Again and again in these verses Jesus encourages us to remain in the vine, or as the older versions say "abide" in the vine: "*remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*" (verse 4) How do we remain in the Vine? We've talked about union with Christ, something that's already happened, we are united to Jesus Christ by faith; now we need to talk about *communion* with Christ. Communion with Christ is constant fellowship with him, through prayer, through reading His Word, obeying his commands, through fellowship with his people.

Perhaps an illustration from marriage will help. When someone gets married, there's a promise and piece of paper which says, "I'm joining with you for life, I'm united with you." That is like our union with Christ. But no marriage survives on those past promises and covenant, marriage needs an ongoing daily living and loving relationship! That is like communion with Christ. Yes, we are united with Christ by faith, that union was declared to the world at our baptism, but we need ongoing, fellowship with Christ, we need communion with him, day by day, moment by moment.

I know I've used this illustration before, but it is one of the finest practical examples I know of constant communion with Christ. Someone asked the great evangelist Billy Graham how often he prayed, and he replied, immediately and sincerely, "I am praying at this very moment how to answer you." That's communion with Christ. Billy Graham had learnt what Paul encouraged us to do "pray continuously (1 Thessalonians 5:17) And what a joy and a privilege to have this constant communion with Christ, through prayer, with the promise that "*If a man remains in me (that's union) and I in him, he will bear much fruit.*" (verse 5)

#3 The Father is the Gardener

"I am the true Vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit (let us pay solemn heed to that warning, perhaps Jesus is referring to Judas who has just left them but looked the part, even performing miracles, but in the end bearing no fruit), while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." The Grand Horticulturist, the Heavenly Vinedresser is our loving Father in heaven. And he wants lots of fruit: "*This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*" (8) How does he get his fruit? He prunes the branches, he cuts off this part and that part! Notice that everyone gets pruned! If you are not bearing much fruit He will prune you, if you are bearing fruit, he will prune you to produce even more! How does the Father prune us? Through the Word given to correct and rebuke us, and through trials and tribulations.

I think if branches could talk, they'd say, "Pruning is painful!" One man watching vinedressers in his native Austria described how savage the pruning seemed to be to the nonprofessional, but when he saw the results, he realised that the gardeners knew what they were doing: "*After the harvest they would prune the vines to near ground level. The first*

time I watched them I thought they were going to destroy their vines. During the winter months all I could see on the hills were rows of stakes holding up wire... the cold winter soon transitioned into spring, and the vineyards began to produce vines that quickly grew up the stakes and across the wires and so tiny grapes appeared that would ripen for the fall harvest. The farmers really did know what they were doing."

Is there someone here who is feeling the Father's blade? You need to be encouraged! Pruning is a mark of the Father's love for you, and his desire to accomplish something even greater through you! Even more fruit! Another word for pruning is discipline: *"Endure hardship as discipline... 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. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees."* (Hebrews 12)

(4) ...so what is the Fruit?

What is the fruit of being united with Christ and communing with Him day by day? It is everything that happens in our hearts and characters and lives as a result of coming to know Christ. Supremely it is becoming more and more like Jesus Christ, whose character is described in Galatians 5:22-23, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

God wants us to bear fruit no matter how old we are! Whether we are baby Christians, just baptised, or whether we have been "on the road" for years. The promise even in old age is this, "They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green." (Psalm 92:14) Let's close with a hymn, which is also a prayer, that the beauty of Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit, found in us too.

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and pow'r controlling
All I do and say.*

*May the Word of Christ dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His pow'r.*

*May the peace of Christ my Saviour
Rule my life in every thing,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.*

*May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.*

*May His beauty rest upon me
As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel,
Seeing only Him.*