

Introduction—the buds that flourished and the buds that died!

Thank you Brendan, and good morning to everyone listening in today.

A week or so ago, I accidentally knocked over a beautiful Amaryllis plant in our conservatory and one of the three flower buds broke off. I thought I could

save the broken bud by placing it in a cup of water, but it refused to open. - the two buds which were still connected to the plant grew and blossomed, but the bud cut off from the plant withered and died. Nothing surprising about that you say!

Buds - *or branches*- which remain connected to their life-giving plants thrive and grow and bear fruit, but branches cut off from their life-giving source wither and die. We all know this.

Our Seventh I am

Well the same is true about a Christian's spiritual life: if we are

connected to Jesus Christ, then we will not only flourish, we will also bear much fruit, our lives will be useful and a blessing to everyone around us. If however we are cut off from Jesus Christ we won't bear any fruit, but instead we will wither and die. That, in

a nutshell, is the teaching of the 7th and final “I am” Statement of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, John 15: *“I am the true 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 so that it will be even*

more fruitful... If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit..”

The Opening Question

The opening question for each one of us today is this: do we want to bear more fruit than we do already?

God wants us to bear ***MUCH fruit:***

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

And ***every Christian*** heart surely echoes “Amen” “I want to be a more fruitful, a more useful Christian.”

Well through today's "I am" we shall discover the secrets of a fruitful life.

(PAUSE)

The background

To understand the words of Jesus better we must consider the setting in which they were given. So let's spend a few moments on the context.

The Background

Jesus said these words on the evening before his crucifixion, when he was in the upper room, eating “The last supper” with his disciples. Judas the betrayer had just left the room and Jesus has just predicted that Peter,

another of the Twelve would soon disown him three times. (PAUSE)

So the *apostasy of Judas* and the *imminent failure of Peter* is the background to this “I am”. How could Judas, someone so close to Jesus, betray him like that? Because he wasn’t really connected to Jesus! And what is

happening to Peter, that seemingly strong follower of Jesus? Well he is going to be pruned to make him a more fruitful believer.

Jesus uses *this* situation to teach all his disciples *how to avoid* being a fruitless Christian like Judas, and *how he makes*

us even more fruitful - for that is what is going to happen to Peter.

The Image

Here is the image we must fix in minds

Jesus is the Vine providing life for the whole plant

The *branches are individual believers*,
you and I

The fruit is

- ***A character that increasingly displays the fruits of the Spirit:*** love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control.
- the fruit is a ***life*** of increasing holiness
- the fruit is ***growing love***

· the fruit is ***broadening usefulness***,
using the gifts God has given us,
whether time or money or spiritual gifts
God the Father is the Gardener who
tends the vine – he cuts off branches
which do not bear fruit and throws
them into the fire, and he prunes those
which are bearing fruit (PAUSE)

With all this background in mind let us learn together how God develops ever-increasing fruitfulness in our lives

How God makes us more fruitful

If we want to bear more fruit—which every believer surely does!— then we need to pay close attention to these three words:

**(1) First, a warning—the Gardener cuts
off those who bear no fruit**

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit...” (2) “If anyone does not remain in me he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up thrown into the fire and burned.” (6)

If we do not bear any fruit, then the Father, the Gardener will cut us off and throw us into the fire. That is precisely what has just happened *to Judas*. He looked like he was connected to Jesus, he looked like he was connected to the Vine, but we read in John chapter 12 that he was a secret unrepentant thief.

All the time he was "following" Jesus, he was stealing from the money people gave to support the disciples. The tragic end of Judas is meant to serve as a ***warning***. Just as a road sign warns us of a sharp bend so that ***we slow down***, keep on the road and are saved from destruction, so the example of Judas

serves as a warning to prevent us from being like him. (PAUSE)

*“There are many professing Christians”
(here’s our good friend JC Ryle again!)..
whose connection to Jesus is only
outward and formal. Some of them are
joined by baptism and church-
membership. Some of them even go*

further and are regular attenders and loud talkers about spiritual matters, But they lack one thing... they have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit.”

Judas bore no fruit because he was only apparently, outwardly, connected to the Vine, not inwardly, not really.

And he serves as a sober warning that it is possible to look like a Christian but not to be a true one.

Apply

If I am speaking to a pretend Christian, then **today is the day** to become a true one!

Illustration—Masih Family

In the 1970s, a large South Asian family joined the Asian Christian Fellowship in Wolverhampton. They all thought they were Christians, but through the preaching they realised they were not, but God powerfully converted them. One of the sons said this to me:

“My family were nominal Christians... until Mr Summers preached on being born again. They had religion but no relationship with the Lord. They thought they were on their way to heaven because they were born into a Christian family but came to realise that they weren't.”

Well - today is the day for pretend Christians to become true Christians by turning from their sins and believing in Jesus Christ.

APPLY How does God make us more fruitful? First, by warning us that we must be connected to Jesus to bear fruit. (PAUSE)

The second way God makes we his branches more fruitful is this: he prunes us.

(2) A Pruning—God the Father prunes us

*“every branch that does bear fruit **he prunes** so that it will be even more fruitful.” (2)*

The Gardner bothers himself not only with branches that bear no fruit, he bothers himself with branches that *are* bearing fruit! Why doesn't he leave these good branches alone?! I mean, grapes are growing on them! Because he wants them to ***bear even more fruit!***

Watch him! He cuts off dead twigs on those branches—that's understandable—and then – surprise? - he lops off green leaf which is absorbing goodness that could go into the fruit!

Gardeners prune good branches to make them produce even more fruit!

And my guess is that if plants could speak they would shout “ouch” with every cut of the pruners knife!

Example—Peter

“Pruning Ouch” is what is going to happen to Peter. Peter is too **self-confident**, “*I will lay* down my life for you.” “I can do it.” And God is going to

allow him to pass through the painful experience of personal failure—not to harm him, but to prepare him for greater works and more fruit! And the Lord will do the same with us.

Sometimes his pruning knife cuts off things in our lives that ***harm us***—a friendship that is unhelpful, a besetting

sin that holds a believer back in condemnation and guilt.

But ***at other times*** his pruning knife shears off things that are not bad in and of themselves but are ***green leafy foliage that is just sapping*** away our spiritual energy.

A hobby or career that has become an idol; someone in our lives that is threatening to take the place of God; health or wealth in which we have placed too much trust.

Apply When we are feeling the gardeners pruning knife, let us remember three truths:

- ***1. Pruning proves that we are already bearing fruit! (The gardener only prunes branches that are already fruit. That should encourage us!)***
- ***2. Pruning will result in more fruit!***
God our loving Father wants us to be more fruitful! (We sometimes ask God for more fruitfulness carelessly don't

we?! Forgetting that pruning is his chosen way! We want the fruitfulness but not the pruning!!)

- ***3. And we should remember*** that we are never closer to the Father than when he is pruning us!
- ***(PAUSE)***

Illustration—pruned to death!

I remember a Christian lady telling the story of a tree she and her husband had pruned in their front garden. Her husband stayed home that day to welcome the gardener and help out.

When the wife returned she was horrified at what the Gardener had

done! The tree looked dead and it seemed to her as if it could never recover. “How could you let the Gardner do this?” she reprimanded husband! But a few years later, a few years later! The tree returned with a vigour and a beauty and health it had never had before that pruning!

Apply Am I speaking to a recently pruned Christian branch? God has pruned back so much and so hard, you say! But be encouraged, for just as winter comes before harvest, so does pruning come before greater usefulness and fruitfulness. So do not despair!

(PAUSE)

How does God make us more fruitful?

- He ***puts the fear of God into us with a warning***—if you bear no fruit, you will be cut off and thrown into the fire

- He ***prunes us***— both of the bad in our lives and sometimes even of the good

And finally, to bear more fruit he gives us something he wants us to do, an

encouragement, —stay connected to the Vine.

(3) An Encouragement—remain connected to the Vine

*“If a man **remains in me and I in him**, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (v7)*

Just as a vine branch must remain connected to its vine to bear fruit, so we must remain in communion and fellowship with Jesus if we are to bear fruit, for without him we can do nothing. Absolutely nothing.

How do we remain in the Vine?

***(i) We remain in the Vine by keeping
the words of Jesus in our hearts***

***“If you remain in me and my words
remain in you, ask whatever you wish..”***

(7)

**We remain in the Vine by reading and
meditating on God’s word. Fruitful
Christians—there are absolutely no**

exceptions to what I am about to say—
are Bible loving and Bible reading
Christians.

***(ii) And we remain in the Vine by
obeying those words of Jesus, and
especially his command to love:***

*“If you **obey my commands** you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed my Father’s command and remain in his love... my command is this: love each other as I have loved you.” (10-12)*

This “remaining in the Vine” is a daily, hourly, momentary, listening,

communing, praying, reliance on Jesus
Christ the life-giving Vine. (PAUSE)

The blessings are not only more fruit

And if we remain in the Vine, says Jesus,
a whole cloud of blessings—***beyond
bearing fruit***—will be ours:

- Our prayers will be answered (7,16)

- We will bring glory to God the Father (8)
- We will prove that we are true disciples (8)
- And we will experience the Lord's love (9), his Joy (11) and even his friendship (14)

God wants us to bear much lasting fruit.
That is surely exciting! How does he do
it?

- He ***warns us*** that if we do not bear
fruit we will be thrown into everlasting
fire

- He ***prunes away*** both the evil and
even sometimes the good

- And then *he encourages* us to remain in him day by day, and moment by moment

Let us close with a song which reminds us that as we endeavour to do these things, Jesus will help us, and we can say “Not I, but through Christ in me.”