

19. Abide In Me

The thirteenth chapter of John pictures for us the Passover supper as celebrated by Jesus and His disciples the night before the crucifixion. During this supper one of the twelve disciples would depart, never to walk again with them. Judas would even betray his Lord thinking he was promoting the kingdom of God on earth. During the meal Jesus had told them He was going away and that they would not be able to follow Him. As usual, Peter asked the question they all, no doubt, were thinking: "Where are you going and why cannot I follow you?" Then follows a sincere commitment, "I will lay down my life for Thy sake." John 13:37. Peter and the disciples would make other commitments this same night.

Mark 14:30,31 reads "And Jesus saith unto him, (Peter) Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice. But he (Peter) spake the more vehemently, If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise. *Likewise also said they all.*"

Jesus knew that the response from these men was sincere, but the flesh was weak. Their own failures would be Satan's effective weapon to discourage them. In order to counteract this inevitable experience Jesus gave them the beautiful message of John 14.

At the conclusion of His message we find the simple expression: "Let us go hence." Jesus knew where He was going. The disciples only desired to be with Him so they followed. It was night and the city streets were, no doubt, filled with people for this was the time of the Passover celebration. At these seasons the hills were dotted with tents, for there was not enough lodging in the city for the throngs that attended on these feast days.

Jesus and His disciples left the upper room and went into the busy street. He led the way toward a familiar spot that was very dear to Him—the Mount of Olives. This

was not His destination, but He took advantage of a flourishing grapevine to give one more lesson to these men whom He loved so dearly.

The moon was shining upon this vine when Jesus stopped and fastened His eyes upon it. No doubt each disciple also looked at the vine. Then the words came clear and forceful, breaking the stillness of the night, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman." John 15:1. I can hear Peter as he may have turned to John and said, "Did you hear what He said? I don't understand, everyone knows that Israel is the vine!" John may have responded by saying, "I don't understand either, but let's listen. He may explain it." Jesus went on with the lesson.

"Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He (My Father) taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, He (My Father) purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." John 15:2.

The terms "vine," "branch," "husbandman," "purgeth," etc. were all familiar terms, for vineyards were common in that area. The disciples understood that the purging was done with a pruning knife. No doubt, the message that a branch not bearing fruit would be cut off completely, and if it was bearing it would still be cut but not so severely, was clear to these men, even if it did not fit into their scheme of thinking. The Jews certainly did not need such severe treatment! They were Israelites—children of Abraham! For many generations they had been in the vine until, in their minds, they were the vine itself.

Jesus attempted to encourage these men by saying, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." John 15:3. These words can be best understood in the light of other Scriptures such as, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . ." Colossians 3:16. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

James 1:21,22. Christ was really saying, “Ye are clean through believing the word which I have spoken unto you.”

The real burden on the heart of Christ is made clear in the next verse: “Abide in Me, and I in you . . .” John 15:4. It is clear that the Master is looking forward to His trial and crucifixion when even His disciples would forsake Him. He urged upon them facts that they had not seen as yet. “. . . As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” John 15:4. It is still true today; we are helpless unless we abide in Him. Even though things seem impossible and all is failing, the message is the same: “Abide in Me; trust Me.”

This message of the vine and branches is best understood when coupled with Romans 11. We have here an olive tree instead of a grapevine. Both were symbols of Israel and, as such, were revered by the Jews. The wild olive was a symbol of the Gentiles, and the good olive was a symbol of Israel.

Grafting is the process by which the wild becomes tame and, therefore, useful and good. The process of grafting teaches the basic secret of living the Christian life. Like most things that are worthwhile, we must do a bit of digging to find the truth.

When Romans 11:24 speaks of a wild olive tree and a good olive tree, Paul is referring to the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. The only way a branch from Satan and his kingdom can become a branch in Christ and His kingdom is via the process of grafting.

The Husbandman (Christ) goes looking for a branch (us) that desires to become a part of His kingdom. Christ says, “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit . . .” John 15:16. Christ, in His unspeakable love, calls all men but only a few respond to that call by yielding to Him.

Before Christ can do anything toward grafting the branch into Himself, He must prepare the good olive tree to receive the wild branch. Paul says that this is contrary to

nature. But, are not most of man's ways contrary to Christ? "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." Isaiah 55:8.

Man takes a good branch and grafts it into a wild stalk or root system and thereby produces good fruit. God takes a wild branch and grafts it into a tame root system and produces the very best fruit possible. Man cannot do his work in the way God does His. The whole plan of salvation is God working in His own way in the lives of men and man allowing Him the liberty to do so.

If a man does his grafting work the way God does His, the only product is more wild fruit. This, alone, should teach us that our only work is to surrender and trust the Master-Worker. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:" Isaiah 1:19. The willingness is ours; the obedience, He accomplishes in every trusting soul.

God prepared the good Olive Tree to receive the wild branches at Calvary. But we say, "What about those from Adam to Calvary?" Remember, Christ is " . . . the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Revelation 13:8. Every wild branch from Adam until Jesus returns must be grafted in at Calvary.

"The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself."¹

Now that we have been drawn to Calvary, let us see how the Husbandman does His grafting. Like the horticulturist, the Husbandman takes the pruning knife and cuts the willing branch completely free from its former sources of life. This initial work is

severe and must be done by the Husbandman. Our only part is to desire and be willing for Him to do the work. We must be careful not to complain as to *how* He works.

The good Olive Tree must be wounded in order to receive the branch to be grafted in. That wound was inflicted at Calvary. Now the branch must be shaped to fit into the Calvary wound. “. . . everyone who confesses Me by sharing My sacrifice for the lost shall be confessed as sharer in the glory and joy of the redeemed.”²

Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ . . .” Galatians 2:20 and, again, “. . . they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh (old nature) with the affections and lusts.” Galatians 5:24. When the branch is cut off from its former source of life, it is cut off from its old nature. But the Husbandman does not leave it to die. He carefully puts the branch in the wounded, good Olive Tree. Then He covers the joint with grafting wax (His robe of righteousness). The grafting wax is intended to keep out any infection or disease that would hinder the growth process.

“The Father’s presence encircled Christ, and nothing befell Him but that which infinite love permitted for the blessing of the world. Here was His source of comfort, and it is for us. He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. The blow that is aimed at him falls upon the Saviour, who surrounds him with His presence. Whatever comes to him comes from Christ. He has no need to resist evil, for Christ is his defense. Nothing can touch him except by our Lord’s permission, and ‘all things’ that are permitted ‘work together for good to them that love God.’ Romans 8:28.”³

The Husbandman is still not finished. He then takes strong grafting tape and winds it around the branch and the tree stalk. Layer after layer is applied until the winds and storms of life cannot loosen the branch that is grafted in. The branch must become one with the Olive Tree (or Vine).

“The connection of the branch with the vine, He said, represents the relation you are to sustain to Me. The scion (branch) is engrafted into the living vine, and fiber by fiber, vein by vein, it grows into the vine stock. The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch.”⁴

Even then the Husbandman is not through with the branch, for His purpose for the branch is fruit bearing. “. . . The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance . . . “ Galatians 5:22,23. This brings us back to the wedding garment again, the robe of Christ’s righteousness which is His character, the robe we must all wear in order to be ready for the Lord’s return.

In order for this fruit to appear there will have to be some pruning. This is also the work of the Husbandman. There is often an overgrowth that must be cut back to develop strength in the branch. Excessive foliage often gives the wrong impression and hinders the fruit from proper development.

The one thing the Husbandman keeps looking for is the deadly characteristic common to almost all branches—the tendency to droop. The problem is that when the drooping branch touches the ground, it sends out rootlets and then tries to take its nourishment from two sources. But Christ says, “No man can serve two masters . . . “ Matthew 6:24.

The pruning knife must be used to cut these rootlets so that the branch will have its life from only one source. With tender care the Husbandman lifts the drooping branch and fastens it to the trellis where it can breathe the fresh air and bathe in the sunshine of God’s love. Every inherited and cultivated tendency to evil is cut away in this pruning process which is called sanctification. This is the work of the Husbandman. The branch is to abide and let the Husbandman do His work as He knows best for each of us.

Only by abiding can we walk in perfection, for that perfection is His, not ours. How appreciative we should be that He allows us to be clothed with His robe of righteousness.

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Notes

- 1 The Desire of Ages, p. 176.
- 2 The Desire of Ages, p. 357.
- 3 Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 71.
- 4 The Desire of Ages, p. 675.