

Purging

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Preacher: Prof J.Douglas Macmillan

- [0 : 00] I'm coming this evening to the portion of God's Word which we read in the Gospel according to John. John chapter 15.
- And we'll see at the beginning of the chapter. I am the true vine, and my father is the husband man.
- And every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away. And every branch that beareth fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.
- And especially the words in verse 2. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away.
- And every branch that beareth fruit, he purges it, cleanses it, that it may bring forth more fruit.
- [1 : 04] One very impressive feature of our Lord's preaching ministry was just its discriminating character.
- How he could divide things that differ, isolate things that appear very similar, and differentiate between them.
- How he could, with just a word or two, sometimes with an action, unveil reality in a way that was unmistakably clear to all who have and to all who saw.
- What a preacher was our Lord Jesus. I think myself that no one could ever have listened to Jesus preaching, and come away from his preaching with anything other than the conviction that he himself was the very man whose moral image was being depicted, whose portrait was being drawn by the Lord Jesus Christ.
- One of the amazing features of the Bible, where it's taken merely as literature, far less as the word of God.
- [2 : 56] One of its amazing features is that it is as a mirror held up to show us what manner of men we are.
- My friend, nowhere in the whole realm of human history, or in the whole sphere of human experience, will you find another mirror so fearful in what it reflects.
- The other evening, in a meeting with our brethren, we were talking of approaching a certain church committee, of which, for the present, I happen to be the convener.
- And, to bring a little touch of humour into things, I said, well, I can approach that committee for us, because I know the convener quite well.
- And somebody who knew who the convener was said to me immediately, do you? Do you really? Do you really know one? Do you?
- [4 : 47] one of them? Do you really? Do you understand? One of them, one of them! For worship Here I did. Do you understand? On one occasion, recorded in Matthew 21:45, these arch critics of all preachers who are listening to him?
- The scribes and the Pharisees. And this is what we read, happened on that occasion. Jesus told one of his very simple yet piercing little parables.

This is what we read when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parable. They perceived that he spoke of them.

My friend, you would be blessed and I would be blessed and it would have been worth our while coming to this service this evening.

If God would so speak to us in our particular condition that we would leave here knowing that he spoke of us.

[6 : 14] Here in John 15, we have an extended parable, the parable of the vine. Jesus said, I am the real vine.

And you, he said to his disciples, you are the branches. And in this parable of the vine and the branch, we have, I think, a particularly striking specimen of our Lord's ability and power to unveil the heart of a man to himself.

Jesus knew, as no one else can ever know, how far a man may go in religion and how far a man may go in Christian profession and yet live and die destitute of real searing grace.

Let me remind you before we go further of when this parable of the vine and the branches was spoken.

it helps us to understand. Let me say this. For 25 years, I have been afraid to preach on John 15 because I felt unable to.

[8 : 10] And I'm not really preaching tonight on it because I feel able to understand the depth and the wisdom and one sense the fearfulness of the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus spoke this parable on the same night as he instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

that was a notable night. It was the eve of his crucifixion. And he went straight from the place where he instituted the sacrament to the Garden of Gethsemane to agonize and to plead out of the frailty of his true humanity if it be possible let this cup pass from me.

It was of this night that the apostle was to write these words. in the same night in which he was betrayed Jesus took bread and broke it and said this is my body broken for you.

It was, I believe having compared Luke and Matthew and John as closely as I can it was, I believe after the institution of the sacrament of the supper that Jesus spoke this parable.

[9 : 58] That means something else. It means it was after Judas had gone out into the darkness of a night that for him was to know no dawning and no softening of light forevermore.

Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said except ye abide in me.

And so did his disciples and I'm sure that it had a very present purpose if I can put it at this parable when Jesus spoke it.

it was to help his disciples. It was to encourage them and yet to warn them and to say to them to make sure work for eternity.

Let's look at just the three things that we have right before us in the text and we'll do it very briefly this evening. A fruitless branch branch that's what Jesus is talking about every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away a fruitless branch and then he talks about a fruitful branch every branch that beareth fruit he purgures and then we have the process to which the fruitful branch is subjected very simply straight forward what is a fruitless branch every branch in me this is one of the aspects of this chapter that I believe makes it an extremely difficult chapter to preach from how is it possible we immediately asked if we knew our

[12 : 14] Bible and our doctrine how is it possible for a branch that is in Christ to be plucked out of Christ and to be cast away do we from this horrible have to believe that it is possible for a soul to be in Christ and then to be with all cast away for eternity well we know from many other places where the teaching is absolutely clear that God says that once a man is in Christ he is in Christ for eternity we know on what we would call the analogy of scripture that this supposed interpretation of what Jesus is saying cannot be the right one let's go back to the historic situation there were twelve and there had been twelve for three years and now there were only eleven and Jesus was saying except he abide in me verse 4 except the branch abide in the vine you were saying every branch in me that beareth not fruit there is a being in Christ which is only a noteworthy apparent reality and there is a being in Christ which is a spiritual and eternal and unbreakable union

Judas was one who bore no fruit and yet so like a true disciple Jesus was Judas but for three years not one of his fellow disciples ever suspected that he was a barren fruitless branch that very night Jesus said one of you shall betray me and the other eleven didn't immediately turn and say we know who it is it's Judas it's the one that hasn't got any fruit they didn't a man with the grace of a John and the faith of a

Peter turn to Jesus and they say Lord is it I a male profession and apparent outward belief my my friend these are not the work of God's grace or of God's spirit these are things that man himself can put on and unfortunately they are the things that much preaching today is asking men to put on in me I have close contact so my friend that's exactly what Judas has close contact with the saviour of sinners far closer contact than many in this church this evening have ever had with

Jesus and Judas is lost forever more where are you going to stand you're not too bad are you true sense in which man can be in Christ they can be in appearance or they can be in spiritual reality in 10 John chapter 10 verse 28 Jesus said this of his sheep his own those who were in him he said they shall never perish now he's not contradicting that teaching there's no conflict in fact there is a beautiful harmony if the spirit opens our minds to see it between the truth of John 10 28 and the truth of John 15 2 how are the sheep to be kept in such a way that no man shall pluck them out of his hands it's very simple by abiding in

Jesus there's a beautiful harmony there you go through the scriptures you will find many similar exhortations to this one exhortations to regenerate believing souls and if these exhortations were not scattered broad spread through scripture old and new testament you would never have had those who have preached that men can be converted one day and unconverted the next they have misunderstood they have not taken the scriptures and compared them but the teaching is there and it's there for a specific purpose it's there as the means through which in exhortation and in counsel and applied in the power of his spirit

[18 : 42] God will keep and preserve his people it is through such scriptures as these that pride of self and fear of self is evoked in us by the Holy Ghost it is through such scriptures as these that the Christian believer will maintain a spirit of earnest prayer and a spirit of clinging to Jesus Christ as his only hope for salvation you will hear the voice of his master resounding in his heart again and again abide in me and he will be afraid of all that would seem to pluck him out of the vine which is Christ let me give you a very vivid illustration of this this fact that there are two ways of looking at a thing and the

Bible uses them both to look at a fact or a truth or a reality from the sovereign point of view point of view of God or to look at it from the human point of view the one we can only occupy apart from the revelation of God's word Acts 27 and Acts 27 22 and Acts 27 gives you the apostle Paul with companions in the midst of a terrible storm they've been there for 14 days and in verse 22 he says I know from God there will be no loss of life amongst you said an apostle then in verse 31 in nine verses we get this apostle saying something else that seems to contradict his logic now we know that Paul was a master magician just as he was our master for the logic and a man taught not only in the wisdom of men but in the wisdom of God and he is not being illogical neither is he being wrong theological when in verse 31

Acts 27 he says unless these men abide in the ship listen you cannot be saved and yet he had said just a moment before God has shown me there will be no loss of life amongst you now Westminster Confession takes these two truths and it tells us that to work out his sovereign purposes God uses means and the means must be used by us one of the things that sovereign saving grace does in us all is to make it use the means by which God fulfills his purposes let me ask you tonight has God ever touched you life in such a way that you are using the means he has given you by which you are to be saved the

Bible the throne of grace the preaching of the gospel the fellowship of God's people on so many more we can't enumerate them and one of the first things that grace does in our soul when it comes to work effectively is to make it use these names a fruitless branch what a solemn terrible thing it is Judas let us remember had already turned away then we read what one of the Puritans said about a fruitless professor of Christ he said a fruitless branch can be so like an ordinary branch that man cannot distinguish until the time of the fruits appearing just so he said a graceless professor of

Christ can be so like the child of the covenant of grace that only God will know the difference until the day of judgment reveals you know he says the fruitless professor of Christ will go so far as to separate himself from outward sin a fruitless professor of Christ will go so far as to separate himself from all worldliness and that's further than many Christians are going today a fruitless professor of Christ he said will even separate himself from this world's goods and his money but he says there is one thing the only one thing from which the fruitless professor of

[24 : 47] Christ will never separate himself he will never separate himself from his own self righteousness his god's of tonight if you're shepherded from sin outwardly.

I hope and pray that you are. Don't ask if you're shepherded from worldliness that God's word forbids. Don't even ask if you're shepherded from money. I hope you're good to God's cause and to needy people. But ask yourself if God's spirit has separated you.

From the self-righteousness of your own heart. Fruitless branch. A fruitful branch.

Here's something very different. Here is life. Here is contact with Christ that begins not on the outward side of life but on the inward.

Every branch in me that beareth fruit. My friend what fruit does your life bear for God?

[26 : 15] Why does he spare it at all? It's only of his abundant mercy that he does. To be in Christ is to be in Christ with a vital living union.

this is what wind dressers do. They put branches into a wild root.

The branch draws all its life and its sap out of the original root. so it is with a real Christian believer all the life and vivacity and reality what God's work in his soul is drawn from the great real mind who is Christ himself.

To the extent without going on to live to the extent that Paul can say I live yet not I but Christ live within me.

there's the basic test my friend. There is the only thing that will produce fruit the kind of fruit in your life and in mine that God is looking for.

[27 : 47] Without that you and I will be fruitless branches supposing God was to leave us in this world for all eternity.

it is communion to Jesus Christ by a regenerating renewing work of the Holy Spirit by that which makes us believe on Jesus united to him by faith it is that that reduces fruit.

He says himself in the language of Old Testament scripture from me is thy fruit found and if it is not from him it is not found at all because it's not there.

What kind of fruit does the branch which is in Christ bear? we read what the fruits of the Spirit are. The fruit of the Spirit is love joy peace are these things in your life my friend?

Love love not just to your immediate love love love love love that goes out to all men joy there's not much joy in the world today although there's there are many attempts in the search for joy men and women are spending millions of pounds seeking for joy and it can be found for not a penny the free grace of God in Christ peace long suffering patience gentleness goodness air these are the fruits of the Spirit what kind of branch do you grow on?

[29 : 58] what kind of life are they seen in? is sin for example in a heart that's broken because of sin is sin in a spirit or is contrite because of how it has grieved God is sin in a heart that mourns because it's not more holy than it is when you pause to think of these things what abusing views of self we should have as I've said before in the pulpit proud Christian is a contradiction in terms the more we'll see of ourselves in the mirror of God's word the more we'll see how little we have to be proud of and then the more we'll see how urgently we do need to be in Christ how are things with yourself tonight my friend have you seen your own life so clearly depicted in

God's word that you know you're lost unless you venture by faith on Jesus as a saviour who is mighty to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him is there a going out of your heart to the man of the cross and the blood that was shed to cleanse from sin my Christian friend is there an advance in holiness and fruitfulness in your life is there a closer walk with God than there has ever been before is there a putting of Christ first in all things and finally just a few words on our last thought the fruitful branch pruned it is not the branch that bears no fruit that is pruned a windresser a gardener doesn't prune the branch in the vine that has borne no fruit and he excites it all together he cuts it out it never will bear fruit my

Christian friend you think this is hard I think it's hard too sometimes it's the branch that bears fruit that God prunes prunes and the more fruit it bears the harder and more severely God prunes it and our one only consolation in the pruning of God because it can be a heart tearing still a rending thing our one only consolation is God is for our good and for his glory and he's the master pruner of lying tree he makes no mistake you know some of us are not very good at pruning I can remember the first time I tried I had seen roses before but not very many and I went out when I became a minister in

Aberdeen to find that there were roses they barked at the front of my house I phoned my brother in law he was in the island of Maran and said you know I never pruning roses and he said yes it's quite easy everything is quite easy when you can do it and I went out and I won't tell you some of the results that happened but the roses weren't very great and then I got to know a man in Aberdeen a little man who had the inability to sit among a crowd of people and who couldn't come to church and yet he had something in his heart that made him visit the man's garden now and again and he was so shy and backward that he would visit it only when there was nobody in the land and he was one of the head gardeners with Aberdeen corporation one of the men who won for the city of Aberdeen time and again the flower of Britain contest or whatever it was called

I can remember the first time it happened we were away for a few days of Easter I suppose they should have been pruned in November but they weren't pruned by Easter holidays and we came back from our Easter holidays and there were all the roses in the front they had been so high you know there wasn't a sign of them because they hadn't been properly pinned for three years I went to see what on earth happened to your roses they were clipped right down to just wee bare roots when we saw we saw all the rose stalks tied together and Beryl the lady said well someday somebody's done it and then a few days later I met the little gardener his name was McMillan and I said Mr. McMillan were you oh yes he said did you see them I've pruned your roses for you oh I said I think you've killed them Mr. McMillan don't see a stalk left in them oh no he said they had to be taken right back he said you'll see

[35 : 59] Mr. McMillan no no no don't worry and you know there was a master man was rosy and they were lovely they grew as they had never grown before so it is with God and then your life bears fruit and holiness when there is in it love love and joy and peace ah you say now he'll leave me for a season of to know my friend he won't he'll get out the big shears and perhaps he'll take you right down to the roots till you've nothing on your own left at all ah but then he'll shine on it with the light of the sun of righteousness on the heart he has broken and proven and then it will bring forth more fruit mr.

mcmillan was once explaining to me or trying to explain to me the basic principle behind pruning he said it's very simple mr.

mcmillan you see with her three years with roses all the growth that was there last year that if you were to leave it would use up all the sap that comes up from the roots so you've got to cut it back so that the sap and the good that's in the root will come right up to the bud you leave then you'll get fresh wood growing and it's only in the fresh wood that you'll get fruit or you'll get roses or you'll get this or that well it's to me at the time quite clear I hope I'm explaining the way he explains but you probably know yourself God does the same in order to grow it is necessary that God cut us back and God will do it because he wants growth what sort of things will he deal with in the life in the life of the believer when he comes to truth

I must have him deal with self-confidence as he did in Peter and he brought Peter down to the place as he pulled him he brought him to the place where Peter had nothing left but this help and I know I know he it is self-moasting in Hezekiah and then Hezekiah to cry to God give me a few more years self-righteousness as in job until job had nothing left at all except this though he slayed me yet will I trust him think it not strange said the same Peter my friend if you've got your eye on true holiness and growth and grace listen to Peter think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try and the fruits what will they be self-abasement humility gentleness with others kindness a putting others before self are seeking to bring

Jesus into everything we do there will certainly be this truth that Christ Jesus will become more and more precious to us prayer will become more earnest and more real and it will be part of our life and our reading of God's word will be more earnest we will come into this mirror in order to find out what manner of men and women we really are and eternity and the blessings of the promise of heaven will be more real and dear and precious to us every branch of me that bears fruit he takes away every branch that bears not fruit he takes away and every branch that bears fruit he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit and my friend is what God wants in your life if you raise more fruit and really all through this sermon

[41 : 39] I've been talking to Christian believers are there some here who are not in the line yet oh my friend when God comes to look at you like what does he find still barren still empty still fruitless in the things of matter how you need to seek Jesus ask God to plant you in the vine because there's only one vine I am the true vine and he said this to Jesus no man cometh unto the Father but by me but by me let us pray our gracious God we humble ourselves before thee and we confess our emptiness and our barrenness we pray that it may please thee to make us fruitful work in us we ask thee to will unto do of thy good pleasure do with us as seemeth as seemeth thee good bring forth fruit in us to the glory of the name of Jesus bless thy people here amongst us we thank thee for them may they become ever more fruitful in thy service and bless those who are not yet thy people because they have never trusted their shoal or ventured their whole life upon Jesus the Savior bring them to him by thy grace watch over us all through the coming days of this week so that whether we live or whether we die we may be found in Christ for his name we ask it

Amen