

Fruit Bearing

John 15.

Notes of an Address by J. A. Trench.

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John 15: 1. In the 15th of John, Jesus contrasts Himself — the true Vine — with another vine which had been familiar to the minds of His disciples, and of which we have frequent mention in the word. We read of it in Psalm 80: 8, and again in Jeremiah 2: 21. Israel was that vine: God had brought that nation out of Egypt and planted them in most favourable circumstances to bring forth fruit unto Him: but though He had planted them wholly a right vine, they have turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Him. The cause of their doing so we have in Jeremiah 2: 13: "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." First, they forsook the LORD, and so, of course, lost, all joy and happiness, and then, as they must have something, they hewed them out cisterns that can hold no water. They turned to the world and tried to find in it what they had lost in forsaking the LORD; but they lost not only their own joy and happiness but also their power of fruit bearing, for we read, "From Me is thy fruit found," and thus defeated the object for which God had brought them out of Egypt, and planted them in a good land. So Israel, the Old Testament vine, had to be laid aside, and here Jesus sets Himself forth as "the true Vine." He alone ever brought fruit to the Husbandman. The Father never came to seek fruit from Him, without finding in rich abundance that which He sought.

John 15: 2. Jesus not only brought forth fruit Himself, but He is the source of fruit in others. "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit," He says, shewing that the branch must be *in Him*, the true Vine, in order that it may bring forth fruit. This sentence gives us the key to the passage: it shews us that the union here spoken of is an *earthly* union, for vines do not grow in heaven, and in heaven there is no fruit bearing in the sense of this passage. The heavenly union of Christ with His body was not yet formed or manifested, for Christ was not yet glorified, and until He was we do not hear of a Head in heaven and members on earth. Our union then with Christ as members of His body is not here alluded to; that is indissoluble, and independent of us altogether. The union here spoken of may be dissolved, and is dependent upon our abiding in Him.

It may be said, None are disciples, but those who are true. disciples, and as such must bear fruit; but that is a misinterpretation of the word "disciple." In the Bible we read of true and false disciples. If men will call themselves by the Name of Christ and profess to belong to Him, they will be taken on their own profession, and fruit will be sought from thorn. They will have made themselves responsible to bear that fruit to God which can only be borne by abiding in Christ. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away;" not "cast forth" as in the sixth verse. The distinction is drawn between the false and true professor; if we, His own beloved ones, cease to bear fruit the husbandman must take us away. This may be done in various ways; it may be by removing us from our position of service for Him, perhaps by laying us on a bed of sickness. There may be also a taking away by temporal life being cut off, which was what happened in the Corinthian church, as we read in Corinthians 11, on account of the manner in which they partook of the Lord's Supper.

"Every branch In Me . . . that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Many of the Lord's dear children are dismayed when they find themselves in trial; they get alarmed and troubled

and question why it is that now they meet with trials unknown till they became the Lord's children. They overlook the blessed truth revealed to us here, that purging necessarily follows fruit bearing. Only bear a little fruit and you may be sure that the husbandman will not spare the pruning knife. One time when walking round an orchard I remarked a tree unpruned: on asking the gardener why he had neglected it when all the others bore marks of his care, he replied, "That tree is half dead, I have no hopes of it bearing more fruit, so do not think it worth the trouble of pruning." Another day I remarked a tree very closely cut, to my eyes almost ruined, so unsparingly had the knife been used on it. Again I asked the gardener, "Why was this?" "Ah Sir," he replied, "that is my finest tree. I look for more fruit from that tree in autumn than from any other in the garden." Just so you may expect to feel the pruning knife if you are bearing fruit; but remember it is a Father's hand that uses the knife. "If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons." Will you consent to be treated as a son, or would you miss this proof of sonship, because "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous?"

John 15: 3-5. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." In the first two verses we had the husbandman's part quite independent of us; in the 4th verse we have our responsibility to "abide" in Jesus: words of deepest and most blessed significance. Abiding in Jesus is dependent upon, and connected with, obedience to His word. Jesus kept His disciples clean by keeping them walking in His word, and we learn from this that the way to abide in Jesus is to walk in obedience to His word, learning His will as there revealed to us. Let us take it as one sole rule of life, so shall we abide in Jesus, and so bring forth much fruit to the glory of God the Father. Seek to maintain a tender heart, and a sensitive conscience — a tender heart that instinctively knows His will, and a sensitive conscience that is aware of the slightest departure from Him.

John 15: 6-8. In the sixth verse there is a change; we read, "If *a man* abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch." Hitherto, Jesus had been using, to the Eleven, gathered round Him, the word "ye," personally addressing the beloved disciples; but there was a vacant place at the table. Judas, the twelfth, had just left. Already he was on his way to the High Priest's palace, thinking for how many pieces of silver he would sell Jesus, and Jesus knows it. It may be in reference to him. He says, "If *a man* abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." But again He personally addresses them in the 7th verse, "If *ye* abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Fruit bearing, we have already seen, is the result of abiding in Jesus: here we have another precious promise and result of abiding in Jesus, namely, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you;" and remark here again how closely are connected abiding in Jesus and His words abiding in us. His words, not His commandments, are here mentioned. But does the heart that is abiding in Jesus' love need more than a word from Him, a passing hint of His wishes? No! it is all joy to the faithful heart to find out one little thing it can do to please Him. There are some Christians that know but little of this kind of obedience; the language of their hearts seems to be, "Show me His commands and I will follow them." They would put themselves again under law, and seem to think it a higher place to be a servant under law, than a son under *grace*; but the truth that characterises this dispensation is *sonship*. Our Father ever seeks for the service and worship of children only.

John 15: 9, 10. In the 9th verse Jesus tells us the measure of His love to us, even as much as His Father bears to Him, and in the 10th verse He tells us that He abode in the Father's love because He kept His commandments. Would we enjoy uninterruptedly and uncloudedly the sense of the love Jesus bears us, we must keep His commandments. Unbroken communion is another sure result of walking in accordance with the word.

John 15: 11. In the 11th verse, He tells us, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." "These things;" what things were the source of Jesus' joy? First to be the true Vine that never failed to bring forth fruit to the Father. Secondly, to walk in perfect obedience to His will and thus to have a perfect plea for intercession for His people. Thirdly, to abide in His Father's love by keeping His commandments. "These things" Jesus reveals as the source of His joy — a joy He would share with us; He would have us as full of joy as He was Himself. He says, emphatically, "That My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Truly to abide in Jesus' love is fulness of joy.

John 15: 12, 13. In the 12th verse He gives us the measure of our love to one another, even the extent of His own love to us. How we fail in this! How often, if we judged ourselves truly, would we find that we loved one another because of some natural amiability, or because we suit each others natural disposition, or because we find each others society agreeable. Does Jesus love us for any of these reasons? Ah! Jesus never found anything in us to attract His love: He loved us when we were enemies, and dead in trespasses and sins, and found no beauty in us, but utter entire loathsomeness; and now that He has cleansed us from our sins, and arrayed us in all His own spotless beauty. He still loves us in the same sovereign way of grace. His love knows no limit, and no partiality. Think you He loves the fruit bearing branches better than the barren ones? Those who bring in much service, you might imagine more merit His love; but such is not His way to love. He loves all alike: the difference being that those who are abiding in His word have a clearer, deeper sense of His love.

John 15: 14, 15. In the 14th verse He shown us that obedience brings us into the wondrous position of being "friends of Jesus." Think of this! What is it to be a friend of Jesus? A friend is one on whom I depend: on whose sympathy I count; to whom I can confide all the secrets of my heart, and disclose the motives of my actions. Such a friend is Jesus to us, and such a friend would He have each of us be to Him. Jesus wants a friend, and He goes to you and asks you to be His friend. Will you be a friend to Him? Then show your willingness by obedience to His will. How can two walk together except they be agreed? And is He not much better able to choose the right way than you are? The difference between my servant and my friend is, that to my servant I give my command without assigning a reason: but to my friend I tell my wishes and also my motives, and this is just how Jesus treats us, as He tells us in the 15th verse. "Henceforth I call you not servants: for the servant knoweth not what His Lord doeth; but I have called you friends: for sill things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

In the 18th and following verses Jesus shows them (the consequence of what He had been telling them) their treatment by the world. He had been telling them that obedience would bring them into the path of much blessing: it would be the source of their fruit bearing; of bringing glory to the Father; the source of successful prayer; of their dwelling in the full enjoyment of His love; of their enjoying brotherly love amongst themselves, and, finally, of their being His friends. In mentioning this last result He would make known to us that not only are we more blessed and happy, by walking in His ways, but that He is the gainer also, for Jesus loves to have the friendship of His people. But He then faithfully reminds them that they cannot be His friends and be loved by the world, "The friendship of the world is enmity to God." Once take Jesus' part against the world and shew yourself to be His friend, and the world will hate you, just as it does Jesus. Just as far as you manifest on whose side you are, so far you may expect it to treat you as it treated Him. Which will you have? Jesus, or the world? You cannot have both. It may be that you will have to meet the world in those nearest and dearest to you. I care not in whom the spirit of the world's opposition may be found, it may be the father, the husband, the brother, the friend you prize most on earth, and you think you must follow their will first. But you have a Father, a husband, a friend in heaven and His will you are bound to follow first. Not first the earthly

and then the heavenly, but first the heavenly and then the earthly. His love is a love that had no beginning and can have no ending. "Greater love," He, Himself tells us, "hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." His love has been proved to be limitless. Which of your earthly friends has ever given you such a proof of their love? Would they ever do it? Ah no! Then yield yourselves to Him. Who loves you best; be His friend; walk in His ways, and you will truly find that "His paths drop fatness."

When the world would bid me leave Thee,
Telling me of shame and loss,
Saviour, guard me lest I grieve Thee,
Lest I cease to love Thy cross;
This is treasure
All the rest I count but loss.