

Session 6

February 28, 2021

JOINING GOD'S WORK

John 15:1-8

Anyone who has tried to grow citrus knows that a lot of work goes into it (even in Florida!). After planting two or three varieties of oranges, tangerines, and lemons, only to see them all wither and die, I came to the conclusion that I could buy a truck load of fruit at the grocery store for the money I sank into the citrus business!

Unfortunately, fruit for God's kingdom (whether in the form of Christian *converts*, Christian *character*, or Christian *conduct*) cannot be bought. It must be *borne* in the lives of God's people. As Jesus prepared His disciples for their future mission apart from Him, He reminded them that bearing fruit was not an *option*, but an *expectation*. In these verses, three key principles stand out.

Preparation (vv. 1-3). By this time, Jesus was leading His disciples out of the Upper Room and toward Gethsemane. Perhaps seizing on the image of the vines growing near the garden, Jesus announced that He Himself was the *true vine* (v. 1), as opposed to the nation of Israel, which had been alluded to as a vine in the Old Testament (see Is. 5:1-7; Ps. 80:8-16; Jer. 2:21 et al.). Here, three components of fruit-bearing are addressed. First, the vine (Christ) is the rooted source of sustenance allowing the production of branches which ultimately bear the fruit. The quality of the fruit depends on the quality of the vine. Hence, a *vinedresser* is employed to keep things in shape. In this scenario, Jesus suggested that God the Father is the vinedresser overseeing Him and the production of spiritual fruit (v. 1). The final component in the metaphor are the branches. These are disciples. Those who produce no fruit are evidently not drawing the spiritual vitality that Christ offers, and are removed. Those who do produce fruit are further shaped ("purged" or "cleansed") by the Father, enabling them to produce even more fruit. In verse 3, Jesus assures the disciples that through the word of God, they are prepared to bear fruit. For reflection: *Do you believe the non-bearing branches talked about here are saved people who drift away from Christ? Or people associated with the church who have never been truly saved? Why?*

Continuation (vv. 4-6). The word "remain" is mentioned five times in these two verses. The word itself is translated to *stay* or *abide*. The form it takes indicates a *continual abiding*; what one commentator called a "faithful persistence." There is absolute dependence here; the branch is the conduit through which the vine works in order to bear fruit. Verse 4 states a negative: believers who are disconnected from Christ simply cannot bear fruit. But verse 5 gives the positive: those who remain "in Christ" will bear much fruit...and do so *continually*. Verse 6 is a dire warning: those who are not attached to Christ have shown themselves to be *lifeless* and therefore *useless*. The image of burning is certainly indicative of the judgement that awaits all who reject Christ (see Matt. 13:40 ff). For reflection: *Compare this passage with Matthew 13:37-43. What additional information did Jesus provide in the Matthew text?*

Multiplication (vv. 7-8). At first reading, verse 7 seems out of place. But the image of the vine seamlessly attached to the branch, and the branch vitally extending the vine's nourishment all the

way to the fruit indicates a further blessing: answered prayer. Why? Because the faithful follower of Christ will be moved to pray for those things prompted by Christ. And God is glorified by giving those things to His children that flow through His Son (v. 8). When the relationship is right between God and His children, there are two important results: an abundance of fruit for God's kingdom, and an unmistakable testimony for Christ. For reflection: *What kinds of spiritual fruit are being produced among the members of your church? What are some things that are helping "fruit production?" What might be hindering it?*