

If You Want to Follow Jesus – part 7

Luke 9:23—Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.

Jn. 15:1-5, 8

--**V. 2** “take up” or “lift up” – Not only fits the context of Scripture but it also fits the context of grape agriculture.

Are you getting the picture of how God deals with unfruitful branches?

--He cleanses us: **Eph. 5:25-26** -- Sin is like dirt on us

--He lifts us up: our worldly way of living has us down on the ground.

1. If necessary, God will use painful measures to bring you and me to a repentance—to a place of fruitfulness.

--Another title for this sermon could be “**The Good News You Didn’t Want to Hear.**”

--**Good News:** that God will not settle for anything but an abundant life for you.

--**Don’t Want to Hear:** we will not let go of some sin and worldliness without a **measure of Pain**

--**Everybody sins from time to time;** God’s discipline comes especially when sin is in habit form—un-dealt with behavior or attitude that is blighting your life.

Proverbs 3:11-12

1. God is the source of discipline.

2. God disciplines all believers.

3. God always acts in love.

2. Why would a loving God want to bring us pain even in a small dose?

--To get a highly desirable result from our lives -- desirable for us and Him!: **Heb. 12:10; Heb. 12:11**

3. Once we understand that God is the vinedresser and how He disciplines us to cleanse us and lift us up to an abundant life, an incredible truth can dawn:

--Our enemy would have us think that because God is dealing with us firmly He doesn’t like us and we are worthless losers.

--**It is only when God doesn’t discipline us that we should doubt His favor.** **Heb. 12:8**

4. Is your branch sick?

--Have you failed to see the possibility that a troubling circumstance in your life may be God’s purposeful intervention because of sin?

--When a child doesn’t heed correction, a good parent raises the stakes.

--If you are persisting in sin, I can assure you you’re being lied to and you’re believing those lies.

Those beliefs will sound something like this:

“**My sin doesn’t have consequences, I’m a believer**”

“**God won’t pursue this**”

“**I like my sin too much to quit**”

“**My sin won’t diminish my effectiveness**”

“**My problem isn’t even a sin**”

--If this is you, I encourage you to embrace the truth.

--The longer you stay in sin, the more you are asking God to raise the stakes.

--**Make an unforgettable, hope-filled change of direction called repentance.**

5. But what about those of us who are bearing fruit? What happens to us? Does He pass us by/leave us alone?

Jn. 15:1-2

--He still prunes us to make us all we can be.

--Understand something: God will not put up with a mediocre crop any more than He will when we are unfruitful.

3 reasons for this:

1. It's not what we were created for in Christ Jesus. **V. 5**

2. It does not bring God glory. **V. 8**

3. A mediocre crop is easily counterfeited.

--In the eyes of the world, our lives look pretty good: no major sins, regular church-attenders, moral, honest people.

--If this is you, you need to know that the enemy is making people like you every day and they are carrying labels like Mormon, Muslim, Hindu (moral, honest, religious).

--How are they going to distinguish you from the others? How are they going to know we are Jesus' disciples (**V. 8**)? **Much fruit!!!**

--A lush rambling vine at a distance it looks great and healthy but on closer examination you find that for all the leaves and wood there **is relatively little fruit.**

--Likewise, at first glance we look like we committed believers but on close examination, we are all leaves and wood—where's the fruit?

6. How does God bring us to the place of much fruit?

--**He prunes us** = to thin, to reduce, to Cut off – sounds like a weight loss program and in some ways it is – He cuts off the things we don't need.

--That is wonderful, God is taking the things out of my life that I don't need.

Here's the rub: some of the things that I don't need are things that I very much want.

Understand: to get more grapes from a grapevine you have to go against its natural tendency.

--Grapevines do not naturally produce lots of grapes this is why they need constant tending.

Left to its own, a branch will always favor new growth over more grapes.

--The result? From a distance = impressive growth but up close, an underwhelming harvest.

--This is why a vinedresser cuts away unnecessary shoots and runners no matter how vigorous because a **branch's only purpose is to grow grapes.**

--Our only purpose is to bear fruit for God.

For the believer, rampant growth represents all those preoccupations and priorities that, while not necessarily wrong, are keeping us from a more significant ministry for God.

--This brings up a revealing question about our hearts: What do we really want?

1. To live mediocre lives in which we pursue our own interest and priorities
2. To live a life of abundance for His kingdom – a life that matters for eternity.

7. If your heart and prayer to God is abundance, then you are asking for the pruning shears!

--In a vineyard, a vinedresser applies the shears for 4 specific reasons:

1. to remove what is dead or dying,
2. to make sure sunlight can get to all branches,
3. to increase size and quality of the fruit,

4. to encourage new fruit to develop.

--Our Father, the ultimate Vinedresser, is guided by similar principles:

To make room for the kind of abundance He created us for, He will cut away parts of our lives that drain precious time and energy from what's truly important.

--Remember the life of a disciple is always costly:

1. You may loose things that are dear to you.
2. You have to stop things that you love to do.
3. You may have to go places you don't want to go.
4. You may have to do things you don't want to do.

The most fruitful and joy-filled Christians are the most pruned ones!