

If You Want to Follow Jesus – part 8

Jn. 15:1-5, 8

--Pruning is not necessarily just cutting away a cancerous growth, but also what is otherwise **healthy growth making room for intended growth.**

--We could be here, we could go there, we could do this, be this or that, but the servant of God submits to His pruning so that we grow, go, do what He has intended for us.

--You've only got one life; you can only be in one place; and really only do one thing.

--In a vineyard, a vinedresser Prunes 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.

The primary reason why a vinedresser prunes: if the vine is not pruned it reverts very quickly to its wild nature.

--Climbing everywhere with its long, sinewy limbs

--Resulting in tiny, scraggly bunches of uneven grapes.

--Do you see the problem?

--Vines last a very long time, but branches have a very short lifespan one season—we cannot afford to miss what God has for us.

Luke 9:23; Mark 8:35—Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.

Paul had to sacrifice a lot to follow Christ--He was a man who found security and significance in many things Phil. 3:5-6

--By the time we get to know him here in N.T., find a man pruned until there was nothing left of his self-life. Phil. 3:7-8

--Notice his life is focused completely on fruit bearing: Phil. 3:13-14

--You may be thinking, "sure, for a spiritual giant like Paul, that should be his focus." It's expected that such a man would face radical pruning.

--"But that surely isn't what God wants for my life?" Are you sure?

Phil. 3:15 --This is the direction God wants to take all of us -- seeking first His kingdom -- will you let Him?

--What is the Kingdom of God worth to you? Worth = what you are willing to pay for it!

--Many people do not completely commit themselves to the Kingdom for fear that they may have to give up things very dear to them and do or endure things that are tough.

Fears like:

--What if God asked me to leave my family?

--What if He asked me to leave the culture or lifestyle I'm accustomed to?

--What if God asked me to leave my job or other sources of financial security?

--What if I am treated badly, in danger, misunderstood, spoken against?

--What if God asked me give up my right to be well-off, to be married, to be a parent?

What if He did? Is the Kingdom worth all that to you?

1. So, God prunes us so we can be more fruitful for His kingdom.

--In pruning, God isn't just trying to take away—He's trying to provide room. **Matt. 6:33**

--"Seek first His kingdom" – God will always prune those things that we seek first, love most, and begrudge giving up.

2. Let's look at the first area where God's shears will be at work:

The people you love the most.

--You say, "Now wait a minute, that's not scriptural. Why would God sever relationships with those I love?" I didn't say sever them, but prune them so that God is indeed your first and primary love.

What sort of pruning might He be doing with you with regard to those you love?

--Maybe it is trusting the care of those you love to God – you don't own them anyway. Are you so focused on them that God is coming second? I hear the shears!

--Maybe it is the support of your family who may not share your same commitment to the Lord?

--Maybe it is your children? We raise them in Bible believing churches where we preach and teach obeying Jesus, but we balk when they say God may be calling them to a foreign field or tough place like the inner city?

3. A Second area where God's shears will be at work: our right to know why God does what He does.

--We are essentially born with the notion that we deserve to be in control of our lives.

--The problem with it is that it is in conflict with the life of faith (faith doesn't see much or have much under control, faith trusts the One who does!).

--How do you explain to a child of God that the trying time they are going through is what they need to grow? it cannot always be done.

--We go through seasons in our faith walk when we are unable to answer questions like Why? Or How Long?

--All we can answer is Who? Our loving Father and He has proven worthy of our trust!

4. Let's look at one more area of pruning: our sources of security and significance.

--Let me first say: should the believer have any other security or source of significance other than the Lord?

--Solid theology, but God is not near as impressed with the theology that comes out of our minds as He is the theology that comes out of the way we live!

--Jesus claims, out right, to be all we need for security, significance --- life!! "**I am the way, the truth,...**" "**Come to Me all you who are weary...**";

--We run to other sources for our security and significance, therefore, this generation of believers is some of the most insecure -- rife with addictions, dependencies, depressions.

--**Where do your securities lie?** Money and possessions? Is there something in you that thinks, "I'm O.K. because I have them or I'm not O.K. because I don't?"

--Do we really believe that if we put His kingdom as first priority that He will add these things to us?

--Could it be the struggles that you are having either with an abundance or the lack-there-of is God saying "Let go of this, I'm your security"?

What are your sources of significance? These are things from which you draw worth and purpose.

For Gideon, it was his huge army.

For Abraham, it was his miracle son, Isaac.

- Your Job?
- Your family?
- Your Position?
- **What is it for you?**

--He may not ask for you to literally give up anything, but I can assure you He is asking for you to hand them over in your heart!