

Friday 24th July 2020

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” John 15:5-8

In this scripture Jesus is revealing several things, but the most important are that we must stay close and abide in him and remain joined to each other. We do this by showing love, spreading the gospel message, and doing good works.

Jesus warns us that not abiding in him can have serious consequences for believers and non-believers. The person who is cut off from fellowship with Jesus withers, and lacks strength and vitality. The branches will be picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. The fire which is referred to could be the fiery trials and sufferings that Peter speaks about or the fire at the judgement seat of Christ. This failure to abide and not be firmly rooted in Jesus will produce spiritual disaster. The encouragement found in verses 7-8 which tells us that if we stay close and abide in Jesus, trusting and obeying his teachings, we can ask whatever we wish and it will be given to us. However, if we become separated from Christ a believer cannot accomplish anything of spiritual value. Another part of the picture is that we must remain joined to our Christian brothers and sisters in love and fellowship. During this time of separation it is vital to keep alive our links of closeness to Jesus and each other. We can do this in quiet times of bible study, prayer and reflection. This will keep the branches of the vine alive and strong. Think of the words of the Hymn 979 in Mission Praise ‘Draw Me Close to the Cross’.

The teaching by Jesus is very real to me because I stayed in a country where I watched the various stages of the cultivation of the vine. The farmer takes great care at each stage; planting, tending and pruning, burning withered branches which bore no fruit. The burning always takes place in January. The hillsides are ablaze and the smell of burning wood fills the air.

In August and September the roads are busy with lorries transporting the ripe grapes to the wineries, temporary road signs warn motorists of slippery conditions from spillage. After the fruit has been safely gathered in for another year workers and guests celebrate at wine festivals throughout the island.

Dear Lord, thank you for your constant love and care, for pruning the dead wood from our lives to encourage new growth. Help us to realize the danger of straying from your side of becoming weak and helpless without you. As we abide in you, the true vine, may we bear much fruit to glorify our Heavenly Father. Amen.