

Divided Kingdom

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

1 Kings 12:1-33; John 15:1-27

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- June 28, 2020

Live from Austin, Texas, at Grace Covenant Church. It's the first time it's ever happened. This is amazing. This is a new step for Grace. I'm so grateful and thankful. Jonathan Britnell and his team of magicians have retooled and rebuilt our technology so that we can broadcast live on Sunday morning. And here's why that's important: because as we regather, as this goes on, we're still going to have most of our congregation not attending because there are more people at risk than there are people who are safe. So, we can all be together on Sunday mornings now, together, livestream, from this point forward. So, that's a great place for us to be.

So, we can gather, but it doesn't mean that we should gather. We're still shooting for July 12th. We're practicing even this morning on how to get people in the auditorium and how far apart they should sit—those sorts of things. But because of the increase in hospitalization rates, we're holding that July 12th very loosely. Stay tuned. We're going to try for that, but we'll see. Besides people coming, we also need to be concerned about protecting the volunteers and the technology people and also the teaching staff so that everybody stays healthy that comes in the room, so that we're not infected as well. So, those are the reasons that we're making decisions. Continue to help us by praying for us as we make decisions about regathering.

Today we're reading through the Bible as a church together. In the teaching time we're in a place where we're hitting what's called the Divided Kingdom period of time. And the Divided Kingdom is a mess. It is just a mess. It's Judges all over again. King Solomon is the last king of the United Kingdom and then his son is the match that is thrown on this kindling that causes a fire that brings about a civil war. And after this period of time—it's called the Divided Kingdom because there's a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom—they're going to be called Israel and the southern part will be called Judah—there are going to be thirty-nine kings over four hundred years. Only eight of them are any good.

So, you can imagine that they're in this free-falling roller coaster ride of being in dreadful situations. And it grieves us to read it. It was desperate for them to be in that situation and it broke the heart of God to watch that happen.

When you read the Divided Kingdom period, you wonder, *Is there anything that we can learn from that? Can we learn from that storyline how God works?* Maybe we could learn a few lessons on how to avoid the pitfalls that they went into or maybe from those eight good kings—maybe there’s something that they did that could help us live our lives. How do we grow from the storyline of the Divided Kingdom as God is working out salvation for mankind?

The Covenants

Well, if you want to know the heart of God, if you want to know the mind of God, you go to the covenants. That’s the key. Those are the promises, the contracts, between God and man, where He swears by Himself to do certain things.

Now there are different types of covenants. We’ve talked about this in the series because covenants are so important. There are different types. There are unconditional covenants and conditional covenants.

Unconditional covenants are promises where God makes the promise and the recipient doesn’t do anything. They just receive it. God does all the work. Unconditional covenants are to Abraham and David and they’re salvation covenants. Our salvation promise from God is merely unconditional. He does all the work, we just receive it. And it’s a good thing it’s an unconditional covenant.

But there are also conditional covenants. You’ll hear it in the case of Israel and with us as well. It is after the fact. Many of these are after the fact, after God says, “I love you and you can’t stop me from loving you. You are mine, I have adopted you, you can’t leave. You will always be mine.” Then the conditional part says, “Now, you want to get along? Do you want a good life? Do you want to see how the world works? Do you want to live a life so that you feel my joy and avoid my grief?” Those are conditional covenants.

And it happens in Israel—as a matter of fact YHWH makes a conditional covenant after Israel is saved by grace, a miraculous salvation experience out of Egypt. God calls them “my people.” “You are my people” in an unconditional, miraculous way. Then He takes them to Mount Sinai and He makes a conditional covenant with them after the fact. They belong to Him and He says, “Look, you want to get along?” Exodus 19 through 24 is a conditional covenant. It’s called the Mosaic covenant.

A new Israel will show up forty years later and He'll make the same conditional covenant to them. That's called the Palestinian covenant because it's in Palestine. And that covenant goes like this. "Happiness and safety, Israel, is conditional. If you obey my laws, I promise you will be prosperous and protected. I will provide provisions and protection. But if you reject me and go out on your own, you're on your own. You're on your own for your provisions, you're on your own for your protection."

And so, when you see the Divided Kingdom period and you see the melee that's taking place there, it is heartbreaking to God because it is predictable. There's no mystery to why they're in such a destitute place. It's because they have rejected the conditions of a conditional covenant. They're living out the cursings of the covenant in their disobedience.

So, I was studying these thirty years ago with Greg Herring in a Bible study. We were going through the covenants together because that's a great way to study the Bible and know God's will. And I think he asked, "Is there anything in the New Testament that would reflect a conditional covenant for us? Is there something that's like the Mosaic or Palestinian covenants for us?"

John 15

And so, he and I thought, "Let's find out." Here's what we came to. John chapter 15. If you have your Bibles with you, turn to John chapter 15. What an amazing chapter. It's not a covenant—just to be clear, it's not a covenant. But it is a conditional promise. It's a promise being made from God to His children, you and me, and He just says that happiness is conditional. It's kind of up to us. We need to decide.

The context of this promise that Jesus made makes it all that much more meaningful. It's a very tender time. This is the night that Jesus was betrayed. It is after the Lord's Supper and He's on His way to the Garden of Gethsemane. And they went through what was probably an ancient vineyard on their way there. And there they are, kind of hemmed in by all those vines. And He just stops and He says—listen, this is one of the last things He ever teaches—He says, "This is how the soul works. Listen, men." There were only eleven of them. "Listen, guys. I'm going to tell you the mysteries of life. I want you to know the meaning and purpose and the means of life, because you're going to love the end. This is how it all works." And so, He makes this conditional promise to them.

So, when I read these verses that I'm about to read, I'd like for you to be listening for the conditions in this: what God is going to do, what we are going to do. And then, what we get out of it. So, I'm going to read the first eight verses. Close your eyes and picture yourself in a giant vineyard with Jesus Christ saying this, these last promises before His death.

John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He lifts up every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciple.

“I am the vine and my Father is the gardener. He lifts up every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Now you remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“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 to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Those words are written for you and for me. This is Jesus speaking to us in a way, at least, as His audience. It was crystal clear. It was crystal clear to them. They're in a vineyard, they all know how to grow grapes. They know how to do that because it's instinctive to them. They're farmers. We don't. So, let me try to explain to us urban people living in the suburbs what the illustration is trying to show us, the metaphor.

The Parts of the Plant



Jesus says, "I am the true vine." If you're growing, if you have a vineyard, the true vine is the one that is as big around as a quarter or a fifty-cent piece. It goes up and it hits a crossbar, a trellis that goes across. That's the main source of the sap. He's the true vine.

Then He says that the Father is the gardener. He's going to do the work to make this vineyard produce fruit. And He's responsible for making sure that happens.



You and I? We're the branches. We're coming off those main vines that are Jesus Christ. But know this—it is the nature of the vines to just run wild. They're just going to go as far as they can and produce leaves, maybe a few sour grapes. But that's what they do if they're left alone because that's the easiest thing to do. That's what makes it simple, left alone.

The Goal Is Fruit



But the goal here, to be clear, is fruit. More fruit. Much fruit. God wants us to thrive in this life. All this talk about fruit—what is the fruit? The fruit is to become like Christ in all of life. The fruit is Jesus Christ breaking out inside of us. It is the thoughts of God, the heart of God, the courage of God in our lives. The fruit is how we were made to be, what we were meant to be like.

Galatians 5:22

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And the fruit of the Spirit sometimes—there’s actually a list of those. Look in Galatians and see if you don’t want some of these. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” We are created for that fruit. We were made to make that kind of fruit happen in our lives. Who doesn’t want that? You want joy in your life? Yes, you do. You want peace? Much peace, more peace? Yes, you do.

And here’s why. Because we were created for abundance. We were created, in the metaphor here, to make a lot of good fruit. Fruit, more fruit, much fruit. It is the destiny of every believer to produce much fruit.

What God Does in His Part of the Promise

But here’s the thing. The fruit, more fruit, much fruit—it’s conditional. This is the part that’s conditional. The Father’s going to do His part and we’re going to have to do our part.

1. Lifts Up: Discipline

Here’s what the Father does. First, it says “He lifts up.” And that means discipline.

John 15:2a

Jesus said, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He lifts up.

In verse 2, it says, “Jesus said, ‘Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He lifts up.’” What happens here is that some of these vines get so long that they get in the dirt and they can’t produce fruit because they’re dirty. So, He lifts them up. And the idea of discipline—it’s a

metaphor for discipline—what it means is that God, when we do things that are wrong, will step in and sometimes stop us from doing those things. And it hurts sometimes. Discipline is not an easy thing to receive. It's not easy to give, either. And God disciplines us because He's like, in the Old Testament in the conditional covenant section of Exodus 19 through 24 here, and again in Deuteronomy, when He talks about this relationship He's going to have, He says, "Like a father disciplines his son, as a loving father disciplines." Yes, He's going to be that kind of a father. So, He lifts us up when we're doing wrong. He's making things right for us.

Have you ever been in a relationship that's bad for you, maybe even toxic? But you like it and you want to stay involved in that relationship and then somehow it just mysteriously ends, something happens? Mystery solved. That's the loving Father. That's the gardener lifting you up and getting things out of your life that are bad.

2. Prunes: Cuts Back

The second thing the Father does is He prunes us back.

John 15:2b

... while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

The second part of verse 2 says, "While every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." While discipline is stopping us from doing wrong, this pruning is the idea that we're not maximizing our potential because we're distracted. We're not doing all the things that we could be doing right. We have preoccupations, or our priorities--sometimes as you get older you can look back on your life and say, *What was I doing just piddling around in that little stuff?*

If branches are left to themselves, they will run all the way down some of these trellises and they will just keep producing leaves and a few small sour grapes. Because that's what we do, and it's easy. It's not our purpose, but if we're left alone, that's what we'll do. It will look great from a distance. Wow, look at all that foliage. You just can't have any really wonderful wine from that. And so, sometimes if we're just left to ourselves, we do things that are not necessarily

bad, but we just shouldn't be spending our time doing it. It's just a terrible waste of our precious resource of time and energy.

Have you ever been involved in a hobby—you know, not a bad hobby, but it's taking up a lot of your time, a lot of your energy, maybe even resources, like financially? And then all of a sudden it mysteriously goes away and you can't do it anymore? Mystery solved. That's the Gardener pruning back. A lot of pruning has to do with selfishness and it's all about me and He's got to cut that away so we can thrive.

In summary, look. Jesus is the vine and we're the branches and God the Father is the gardener, the vinedresser, and He's not a father like an absentee or Disney dad that is just fun. No, He's a father that disciplines. He'll do what He can to stop us from doing wrong. And He's also not like General Dad, like *You're going to respect me!* No, He's a father that will prune us. He wants to have a relationship with us in such a way so that He can maximize everything we were meant to do. The goal is fruit, more fruit, much fruit, that we would become all that we were meant to be for the glory of God.

John 15:8

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The next verse, verse 8, says: "This is to my Father's glory." See? We glorify God, "that we bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." We validate that we're followers of Jesus by producing all this fruit.

So, that's what He's going to do. It's a conditional promise.

What We Do in Our Part of the Promise

What do we do? We want that fruit. Oh, I want love. I want to be able to give love in my life. And joy—I want that, too. I'm on it. I've got the assignment, here we go. Let's go. Let's work on those attributes, those disciplines. But that's not what Jesus says in this passage. Never will you find in this last bit of teaching from Jesus, the Christ, that you are supposed to go get that fruit in your life. The fruit is an end, not a means. It is a consequence, not a cause. What

we're supposed to do to get fruit in our lives, so that fruit will happen in our lives, is to first and foremost, primarily, remain in Him, or abide in Him. That's how fruit is produced.

1. Remain / Abide

Look—watch. I'm going to read this section again and I want you to see how eight times in eight verses Jesus says "Remain in me." Sometimes He'll use the negative: "If you don't remain in me, you don't get fruit. If you do remain in me, you do get fruit." It's all about remaining. Again, listen for the remaining.

"I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. REMAIN in me and I will REMAIN in you. No branch can produce fruit by itself. It must REMAIN in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you REMAIN in me. 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..."—guess what's going to happen—he's not going to bear any fruit. "Such branches are picked up and they're thrown into the fire and burned. If you do REMAIN in me and my words REMAIN in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples"—*by remaining in me*. Remain in me—

Some of you might be familiar with this passage with the word "abide." Abide, remain: here are some synonyms: lodge, sojourn—listen to how relationally connected the synonyms are—to dwell with, to continue with, to encamp. We would say "to hang out." To go on walks. To have a really close relationship. Watch how these words could be inserted here.

If you lodge with me and my words live in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.

If you sojourn with me and my word travels in your mind, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.

If you encamp with me and my words dwell in you, ask whatever you wish—it will be given to you.

The primary teaching of this passage, the application teaching of this passage, is not *go make fruit*. It's *abide, remain. Remain in me*.

Think of the context. Jesus is in between the Upper Room and the Mount of Olives, in this vineyard, and this is His last night. And He's saying this: *I'm leaving. But you don't have to leave me. You stay with me. You stay connected to me. You need to stay dependent on me. You can't do anything without me. You need to focus ...* He's saying this. *Look at me. Quit looking at the fruit.* This is so me. I'm always looking at the effect and not the cause. *Look at me, not the fruit. I will do the magic. We need to develop a great relationship. That's how you get fruit.*

John 15:7

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.

Look at the two consequences of what happens when you remain in Him. The first one is that your prayers are answered. He said, "If you remain, abide, dwell, in me and my words remain in you, then ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you." That sounds like a blank check, like ask whatever you want. But the context is "If you remain in me and my words remain in you." It's like this: *If you get so connected me, you're going to start quoting me. You're thinking like me. You're going to have the same values as me. And when you have prayer requests, it will be like, yeah, that's just the way we work together.*

Just this last week I was driving back from Costco with one of my daughters. She's back because of the COVID thing, and she's twenty-five, she knows us, that sort of thing. And so, she was so funny because she played back this entire conversation that was going to happen in the future. She said, "Dad, I told you not to buy all those jalapeños." It was like a fifty-gallon drum of jalapeños. She said, "I told you not to buy all those jalapeños. Mom's going to say ... and then you're going to say ... and then she's going to say ... and then you're going to say ... and then you're going to be back here next week returning those jalapeños."

And I said, "Amy, really?"

So, we go home and it was like a script that we read together. My point is, why did Amy say that? Because she's a smart aleck? Yes, she is. But it's because she abides in our family. She has seen this marriage go back and forth so many times that Melinda and I don't even need to talk. We say, "Amy, what do we do? Just tell us what to say. Okay, got it. That's how it ends?"

Let's go to the end." That's what it means to be so connected. See, it's a relational abiding and connecting that you know the mind of God. That's why you can ask whatever you want. It will be given to you

John 15:8

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The second consequence of abiding and remaining in Him is glorifying God. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." The Father shines when He sees fruit in us, much fruit, more fruit. That pleases Him. When we become like Christ in all of life, it is to the glory of God the Father. That's always the end ... always.

So, here's the thing. Do you want peace in your life? I bet you do right now. Much peace? Yeah. You want that. But you don't go after the peace. It would be very common, if I want peace in my life, to have peaceful thoughts, go on a little walk, thinking peaceful things, those sorts of things. But do you know why it doesn't work? Because the voice in my head about being at peace is not nearly loud or violent as the voice of fear and the voice of injustice that I'm hearing constantly. And so, my little walk around the block to get peace, pursuing peace—I miss it.

But this is what the Bible says. You want peace? You dwell on Jesus Christ. You focus on Him. Now here's what you do. You go on that walk around the block, you put in some headphones, you put on the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus taught, and just keep walking. Just keep walking. And when you get home, you'll think, *Oh, there it is. There it is. I've been with the Savior.*

Application

So, how do you do that? Well, a couple of things that we do here all the time. But here again, this is why we're going through the Bible in a year. Join us. Join us in our journey through the Bible in a year, go to our website. You can download a reading list and go to the various websites to get the Bible sent to you. Even some of those Bible apps can read the Bible to you.

Join us. We're towards the end of the Book of Psalms. It's a great time to pick up the story. It's at the other side of the Divided Kingdom.

Another thing I'd recommend is a series that we did in 2011. Go to our website under "Sermons" and scroll down to 2011. There was a series called "Go Vertical" and if we weren't going through the Bible in a year, I would have spent this summer on "Go Vertical." It's really practical practices on how to abide, how to remain, how to stay connected with one another. It's about the practicing of the presence of God.

There's a German philosopher that said, "If you tell me what you do with your time, I'll tell you who you become." Or that old Greek philosopher that said, "We don't rise to the level of our expectations; we rise to the level of what we practice, what we train." If we train in the disciplines of spending time in the presence of God, if we remain in Him, then we produce fruit.

2. Obey

The second thing—part of this condition is what we need to do is obey. Three sentences. Watch how these sentences build on each other and cascade into this great ending about you show yourself abiding and producing fruit by obeying.

John 15:9

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

Verse 9 says, "As the Father loved me, so I loved you. Now remain in my love." Listen to what He's saying. "I'm the vine, the true vine, we're the branches." The Father's love came to the Son; the Son's love is now running through that vein. What's that sap taste like? That's what we get as branches. We get that sap, the love of God. It's come from the Father. I bet it glows. You want that sap.

John 15:10

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.

How do you remain in that love? The next sentence tells us. “If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I obeyed my Father’s commandments and remained in His love.” No mystery. How did Jesus remain in the love of the Father? He obeyed Him. How do we remain in the love of the Son? By obeying Him.

John 15:11

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

And what’s the motivation for the obedience? Next sentence. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Why did Jesus teach all this? He said this: so that the joy of Jesus Christ would be in us and that joy would be complete. So, the sap of the vine is the love of the Father to the Son, and now to us. And now it’s the joy of the Son complete. It’s love and joy.

3. Love Others

How do you like me now? I mean, wow, this is what Jesus is asking us to do. If we remain in Him and we obey Him, we will bear fruit. And then last, He says this: He says you have to love each other. Because there are a lot of vines—those are other people, right? And we all get twisted and gnarly and that’s what a vineyard looks like. He says, *Okay, you’re going to get tangled up. Love each other.* That’s how you express that love.

John 15:12-14

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command.

John 15:15-17

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other

Let me just read it—two paragraphs. “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.” What did He command? That we love each other.

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”

Now, all that love back and forth—many of you know that there are four Greek words for love in the original language here. And the Greek word for love here? *Agape*, the real sacrificial love, not the friendship love. The sacrificial, courageous love. The last words of Jesus in this context are “I command you to love one another.” That’s why when you run into people and they say, “Oh, I’m a good Christian and I’m doing all these practices and these sorts of things, but I don’t go to church, I’m not really involved in the church,” you think, “That’s not even remotely biblical.” Because you can do all that, hypothetically, because you’re not twisted by other branches. The purpose of the Church is to show the world how we love one another. And that draws people to the Church. So, that’s certainly one of the key purposes of the Church, is to express that love for one another. That’s what we’re to do.

Farming for Us: Raking Leaves

I thought what we would do is—if I had to teach this in a way that we could understand this as non-farmers, what would it look like? And so, I’ll try to overlap these things so that you can see the power of the relational connectivity that Jesus is talking about, what obedience looks like, answer to prayer—as much as I can here, anyway.

So, what do we do that’s kind of farming? Yardwork. So here are a couple of pictures of some fall yardwork. That’s all we know about farming—raking leaves. Boom.



Okay. But the point is, look at the older man here that looks like a grandfather with his grandson. Okay, all right. Do you want fruit? Yeah. Do you want character? You bet. Do you want to feel the presence of God? You bet. Okay, where's that? I'm out in the yard raking. That's what he's going to do.

And the picture here is Jesus is going to do what Jesus is going to do, and you need to go where Jesus is.



Even in the second picture you see—I guess this is a father and a daughter. Think about this—with that father/daughter or the grandfather/son, do they need those kids to help them? No. As a matter of fact, they're probably making it harder. What is Jesus up to? What is He doing? What is this raking leaves part of this? He's bringing the kingdom to all of mankind. That's been the storyline that we've been studying throughout the whole Bible. It is to bring the kingdom of God to every single person that we can possibly talk to, to go into all nations, teaching them to obey all that God's commanded. That's what Jesus is up to. That's the raking the leaves, right, teaching everyone to become like Christ in all of life. That's what He is up to. Do you want to be with Jesus? That's where Jesus is. That's what the Church is supposed to do. It's not supposed to get sidetracked by that.

And so, it's interesting that God could do that without us. He did it with a donkey, a talking donkey. I don't know how that worked. But He doesn't need us. So why does He bring us

out to that? Every believer is a minister so that we can rake leaves with Him. Every believer is a minister so that we can be involved in doing what He is already going to do. It is God's sovereign will to bring the kingdom of God and absolute justice into this world. Do you want to be part of that? You're going to need to go out and rake some leaves. That's what God is doing. Do you want to abide with Jesus? This is what Jesus is up to. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want." If you're in the business of doing what Jesus is doing, if you're trying to become like Christ in all of life, His words are rattling around in your head and they're making you think differently, feel differently, and act differently. You can pray whatever you want.



Let's go back to the metaphor of the leaves. Look at how the whole family is out there doing lawn work. The teenage son says, "Hey, Dad, listen, I think I need to go get some gas so we can mow this at the end."

"Sure." The Dad says, "You bet. Why not?"

Or he could say no.

“Why wouldn’t you let me go get gas?”

“Because we need leaf bags too. We’re making a list.”

Even when you hear “no” in your prayers, you’re probably thinking, “You know what? There’s probably a better reason. I don’t know what, but there might be a better reason.”

“Hey, Dad, do you think we should rake the neighbor’s yard too?”

“Right, yeah, that’s an older person and they can’t do it themselves. Yeah, let’s do their yard.”

“What about the other neighbor’s yard?”

“No, they need to learn how to rake their own leaves.”

“Wow, so it’s not always yes?”

“No, there’s a bigger thing here.”

If you obey me, you’ll show that your love is for me. You’re sitting on the couch not doing anything? He’s going to lift you up off that couch. At least it was at our family. *I’m going to lift you up. You’re doing wrong.*

And then, if you’re just throwing rocks at your sister or not raking fast enough, not doing your potential, I’m going to prune you back. Right. So that’s where the discipline comes in, that’s where the pruning comes in. Look how it’s with Him. This is with Him. You get to spend time with Him. And during all of that, you’re loving one another as family. You’re loving one another. And so, you’re helping your younger sister who’s not all that good with a rake because she’s not all that big. You can help her with that. Be patient with her. You can be more encouraging to your brother. You bet. He could use your encouragement. Show him the way.

Conclusion

And here’s the bigger picture of this—this is why it’s so beautiful. You see that family raking the yard together because the father wanted that done and then the kids joined in and they’re doing this in great harmony and there’s joy overflowing, it’s expressing their love for one another? Do you know what happens to the neighbor down the street? He’s envious. Even the kids are envious in the house down the street. They wish they could be part of a family that did that, all working together with one purpose, knowing their father so intimately. And I’m saying

that because envy is one of the major motivations of evangelism, expansion of the kingdom, in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the Old Testament when he was talking about the conditional covenant, he said, “Look, if you obey me and do everything I ask you to do, I’m going to protect you and provide for you and other nations are going to look at that and they’re going to come to a saving knowledge of who YHWH is by wanting to be part of Israel. They’re going to say, ‘What God do you serve?’” And then they tell them the story and they say, “I want to serve YHWH, and YHWH only.”

In the New Testament, they’re going to know you are Christians by your love for one another and they’re going to want to join that love. Envy is a motivating factor for evangelism. If we do what we’re meant to do, the way we were designed to live—think about this—if we were able to remain in the Lord and obey the Lord and then we love one another, we will bear much fruit. Fruit, more fruit, much fruit.

This is what gets me excited about these times that we’re living in right now—it’s really hard to fake this. You can think peace thoughts, you can think happy thoughts, you can think joy thoughts. That doesn’t work. Jesus said, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you.” It’s an effect, not a cause. The cause is intimacy with the Lord, a relational intimacy. And when I think about the times that we’re living in right now and how our church has been preaching for fifty years that every believer is a minister—we can thrive in this. We can thrive in this. Let’s be, not the Divided Kingdom with a bunch of stories of people that are disconnected, disobedient and unloving--let’s be a story of a church that comes together and says, “We’re going to know our Savior. His words will be our thoughts. His desires will be our actions. And we’re going to show our connection to the vine by the fruit that He produces in our life by grace.” Let that sap run—His love and the Father’s joy.

Let’s pray to that end. Let’s be that church.

Lord, when I think about ... when I imagine that moment and how important it must have been to You, knowing that You had hours, just hours, and even minutes with these men, and wanted to leave with them this most important teaching ... Lord, I’d ask that You would help our souls grasp that, that we can’t do anything without You, without tapping in on the sap of the Father’s love through You and Your joy to us. And so, Lord, I’d ask that You—not that You need permission, but maybe just open our eyes to the Father’s work in our life: where You disciplined

us to stop us from doing evil and You've pruned us back so that we would have greater potential for more fruit. We got lost in our way, getting, I don't know, busy.

Lord, I'd ask that You would cause each member, each branch, of this church to thrive and that this church would be a church that thrives because of our dependence upon You, our understanding and enjoyment of our relationship with You, our obedience to You and for our love for one another. Let us be a bountiful church. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Awesome Sunday. See you again next week.