

Fargo Memorial Day Conference-11

Fruitbearing

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald explores the biblical concept of fruitbearing in John 15, emphasizing the importance of abiding in Christ and obedience to His commands for spiritual growth and intimacy with God.

Duration: 41:25

Scripture: Isaiah 5:1-4, Matthew 9:6, Matthew 11:29, Matthew 14:20, Luke 17:13, John 11:41

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the word of God as the most precious possession for Christians. He encourages young people to prioritize their time and focus on studying the Bible rather than getting caught up in trivial matters. The speaker then delves into the biblical passage from Isaiah 5, where God is depicted as a vineyard owner expecting good grapes but receiving wild grapes instead. This serves as a metaphor for the nation of Israel turning away from God and becoming idolatrous. The speaker also references John 15, where Jesus describes himself as the true vine and believers as branches, highlighting the importance of abiding in Christ to bear fruit.

Transcript

We turn now to John chapter 15. John chapter 13 previously, now let's look at John chapter 15, and we'll begin reading with the first verse. John 15.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you, as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit. For without me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered.

And they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. You abide in me, and my words abide in you. You will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit, so you will be my disciples. As the Father loves me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love.

You keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. It is my commandment that you love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this one to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friend if you do whatever I command you. The subject here is fruit-bearing, not salvation.

I would never turn to this passage of Scripture to explain to somebody how he can be saved. Salvation is a free gift, but a life of spiritual intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ is for those who abide in him and obey his commands. The Lord Jesus speaks to himself as the true vine, and I think most of us realize that he's contrasting himself here with the nation of Israel.

You read about that in Isaiah chapter 5, verse 2. At this point, please, if you have your Bible, go to Isaiah chapter 5, verse 2, and also verse 4. Well, I'll begin with verse 1. Isaiah 5, verse 1. Now let me sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved regarding his vineyard. My well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones and planted it with the choicest vines.

He built a tower in its midst and also made a winepress in it. So he expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between me and my vineyard.

That verse incidentally tells you what the vine is there, what the vineyard is there. O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah. Verse 4. What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And of course, that's what it brought forth.

Judah turned away from the true and living God and became an idolatrous nation. It gave itself over to the worship of graven images. Not very nice grapes for the Lord himself.

So the Lord Jesus speaks of himself in John 15 in contrast to the nation of Israel. Here God is the vine dresser and all believers are branches on the vine. The Lord Jesus is the true vine.

A branch in a vine draws its life and sustenance from the vine. It's just there, part of the vine, and the life of the vine flows out into the branches of the vine. We get all our productivity from him.

Verse 2 is a difficult verse, isn't it? Verse 2 is a darling of those who believe in the falling away doctrine. Of those who believe you can be saved and then lost. Look at it carefully, friends.

Doesn't it say that? Or does it say that? And most of those that I talk to today that believe in the falling away doctrine, they don't think that you lose your salvation through sin. They say that you can willfully stop believing on Jesus. That's the way that most of them that I've talked to recently express it.

I always thought that if they fell into deep immorality and something like that, then they figured that they had lost their salvation. But that's not what they say. They say you can pluck yourself out of the Father's hands.

Out of the hands of Jesus. You can just decide to stop believing on him. What does this verse say? Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away.

Look at that verse carefully. Is that speaking about believers? Or is it speaking about false professors? Well, to the Arminians, it's positive proof that a true believer can be consigned to hell. Other people believe that it's referring to a false professor, and others that it refers to a true believer who's removed from service through sickness or death, as in 1 Corinthians 11.

Actually, the interpretations of this verse are legion. And this morning, this afternoon, I'd like to add another to the legion. First of all, I think we have to be honest with ourselves.

It says every branch in me. Every branch in me. I think that limits it to believers.

This branch is in Christ. You know, if something nice followed that statement in our estimation, we'd grab onto it and say, that's a true believer. If there was some great promise with something connected, it can only be a believer.

It says every branch in me. Well, that's what it says, every branch. Now, what about this branch? Well, it says every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away.

Well, it's an interesting thing. That expression, he takes away, that verb, could just as well have been translated, he lifts up. And we're going to do a little exercise in our Bible.

We're going to turn to passages of Scripture which use that way, and where it can only mean lift up. And this is very much in keeping with viticulture, with the culture of vines. Here is a vine dresser.

He goes out into his vineyard, and he sees the branch of a vine down there on the ground. It's still connected. It's still connected to the vine.

But it has become muddied. And perhaps there are little insects crawling over it as well. And he takes that vine, he takes that branch up, and he lifts it up and perhaps attaches it to a stake.

That's certainly what they would do out in California where they have these extensive vineyards. They would lift it up and attach it to a stake. To me, the understanding of verse 2 lies in the fact that the word translated, takes away, could just as well, and I think better, have been translated, Luke chapter 17 and 13.

Luke chapter 17 and verse 13. And I make no apologies for turning to these passages of Scripture. If you're taking notes, you might like to write them down.

Luke 17 and 13. And they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. Same verb.

It would never say, and they took away their voices. Wouldn't make sense with it. They lifted up their voices.

It can only mean in that verse, Lift it up. And it's the same word you have translated in John 15, takes away. You with me? Okay, let's look at some other verses where it can only mean lift up.

John 11, 41. John 11, 41. In the middle of the verse it says, And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

He lifted up his eyes. He lifted them up. That's all it could mean.

Once again, it's the same word. It might not be exactly the same word, but it's the same basic root word that you have in John chapter 15. Acts chapter 4 and verse 24.

Acts chapter 4 and verse 24. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said, And said, Lord, you are God who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them. They raised their voices to God.

He lifted up their voices. And then again in Revelation chapter 10 and verse 5. Revelation chapter 10 and verse 5. And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his hand to heaven. He didn't take it away.

And then there are many other verses in the New Testament where the same word is used. The verses I already gave you, they can only mean lift up. There are other verses where they probably mean that too.

Matthew chapter 9 and verse 6 today. Matthew chapter 9 and verse 6. But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins. Then he said to the paralytic, Arise, take up your bed and go to your house.

He didn't say take away your bed. Take it up. Take it up and go away to your house.

And of course that's found in other Gospels as well. Mark, Luke and John, a parallel account of that. The Lord's words to the paralytic.

Then Matthew 11.29, a very familiar verse where the Lord Jesus said, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Now it doesn't mean take away my yoke from me. It's take up my yoke.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Matthew 11.29. Matthew 14.20. Matthew 14.20. Reading of the 5,000. So they all ate and were filled.

And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. They took up. Same words you have concerning that branch of the vine that's down there on the ground.

Lifted it up. Matthew 16.24. Matthew 16.24. Then Jesus said to his disciples, If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross. It would be hard to think of the word meaning anything else than take up in a passage of Scripture like that, wouldn't it? Matthew 17.27. 17.27. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first.

Well, it could mean. That one's not. I would say it's not so clear.

But usually you take a fish up. When you're fishing, you take it up. It would be rather ludicrous to think of something else.

Mark 16. The end of the gospel of Mark. Mark 16 and verse 18.

They will take up serpents. These are some of the signs that would follow the preaching of the gospel, which they did, as you record in the book of Acts. They will take up serpents.

They will take up serpents. If they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them. They will lay hands on the sick and they will recover.

They will take up serpents. The miracle would be in taking them up and not being bitten by them. And one more in John chapter 8 verse 59.

John chapter 8 and verse 59. Then they took up stones to throw at him. You wouldn't say they took away stones to throw at him.

They took up stones to throw at him. So I present to you these verses as evidence that the word in John 15, speaking about that vine, that branch that does not bear fruit, but very well have this meaning. And I believe it does have that meaning.

There are some verses where it is translated correctly, take away. There are a few in the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But only rarely does it mean take away the destruction.

Very, very rarely does it mean take away the destruction. With that in mind, let's turn back to John chapter 15 and come to our difficult verse once again. Every branch in me, I think that's a believer.

I'm willing to admit that's a believer. That does not bear fruit. I picture that branch down in the ground.

As I say, the rain has come down and covered it with dirt and there are insects crawling over it. It does not bear fruit. He takes, he lifts up.

He takes up, lifts up. And as I say, perhaps attaches it to a stake in the ground. And every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it that it may bear much.

This vine dresser doesn't go into the vine as a destroyer. He goes in to cultivate the vines and to produce fruit. More fruit.

Much fruit. Fruit that remains. Now, the latter part has to do with the pruning process.

And that's to ensure that the needed nutrients will go into the grape and not just into the wood of the vine. And this, of course, compares with what we have in Hebrews chapter 12, doesn't it? Hebrews chapter 12. How the Lord has his pruning processes for his own.

Incidentally, you don't prune sickles, do you? You prune vines. You prune that which is valuable. And the Lord has a way of doing that.

And it explains so much that comes to us in life. And we say, why did that happen to me? Because our Father loves us. Because we're his sons.

Not illegitimate children. We're his sons. And he cares for us.

And he wants us to bear fruit for him. The pruning process means getting rid of everything in the life that diminishes spiritual growth and encourages fruit for God in every possible way. Now, in the next verse, the Lord Jesus says that the disciples were already clean morally and spiritually.

They were already clean. And this fits very nicely with what we had earlier today in John 13, verse 10. John 13, verse 10.

He said, you are clean. The latter part of the verse. You are clean, said the disciples, but not all of you.

Meaning, Judas wasn't clean. It was on his claim that. You are clean.

It means that they had the bath of regeneration. It means that they had been born again. That they had been saved.

That they were on their way to heaven. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. It's really wonderful.

All salvation is based upon the word of God. We wouldn't even know the gospel if we didn't have the word of God. And the entrance of his word brings light to the darkened soul.

So glad for the emphasis that Jim was making on the importance of the word of God. The word of God alone. I thank God, looking back over my younger days, being brought up in an assembly where this was hammered home to us over and over again.

The Bible is the word of God. The Bible is sufficient in all matters of faith and moral. Teth everything by the word of God.

What does the Bible say on this subject? I can go back as far as I can remember and hear them thundering. I remember one time a man came from the Bible Society and spoke in our assembly. And he made a mistake.

He got up and said that the Bible contained the word of God. But the meeting wasn't over before one of the bread men got up and set the matter straight. He wasn't going to let people go out of that place thinking that the Bible just contained the word of God.

He made it very clear that the Bible is the word of God. It was a needed word of correction. I think it was done graciously and I think it was done in the spirit.

So the Lord is here speaking to his own. You're already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you.

Now I don't know what that word, what kind of an image that word brings up in your mind. Abide in me. Is that kind of vague and indefinite in your mind? Well, if it is, I think an easy thing to remember is that first of all abiding is very closely linked with obedience.

With obedience. John chapter 15 and verse 10. If you keep my commandment, you will abide in my love.

If you keep my commandment, you will abide in my love. To abide in Christ means to live in constant communion and fellowship with him. It means to have a close walk with the Lord.

How can you be sure of that? Well, it's not very, very difficult. How can you be sure of a close walk with the Lord? First of all, yield your life to him. Turn over control of your life to him.

Give your will to him and accept his will for your life. Strap your own plans. Strap all the dreams that you have for your own life and say, Lord, you bled and died for me and so I will live.

That's a difficult thing to do. It's possible to turn your life over to the Lord for salvation and not turn it over to him for service. It's possible to accept him as savior and not accept him as manager of your life.

We all have our own plans and we think we know what's best for our lives and nothing is going to interfere with that. But we're really not walking in fellowship with the Lord until we're able to get down on our knees

and say what Bishop Taylor Smith used to say. Every morning he got down on his knees by his bed and he said, Lord Jesus, this bed, your altar, myself, your willing son.

This bed, your altar. That's really the secret, the first step, I would say, in an abiding life. Just to yield yourself to the Lord, a living sacrifice.

Turn over the control to him. To take off your hands from different folks altogether and just live in the realization that he is guiding you. No matter what happens in your life, that's his guidance in your life.

That's the first thing. The second thing is very, very important and that is some constant confession of sin. The first step keeps you available.

The second step keeps you clean. And if you're available and clean, I want to say that the Lord's going to really lead you in your life. Confession, what does that mean? It means we come before the Lord as soon as we're conscious that sin has come into our lives and we make a clean breath with it.

We just tell it out in all its vivid details to him. Of course, it means if we wrong somebody else, we do the same thing to them. It's much harder to do it to somebody else than to the Lord.

Isn't it? Isn't it harder to confess to one of your fellow believers than it is to the Lord? I try to. My pride never reaches. But this is it.

Confession. And be careful of your confession. Be careful.

Be sure that your confession has no ifs in it. Lord, if I have done something wrong, I'm willing to be forgiven. Unless you're a bigot, you know.

But that's not confession. That's phony. And the Lord doesn't like to deal with phonies.

And we do that with one another. Well, if I've done something that has offended you, you know, I want you to forgive me. I don't think any true confession has the word ifs in it.

We're just playing games. True confession says, I was wrong. I am sorry.

I think true confession of an individual, another word it doesn't have in it, is we. You know, a believer was being dealt with by a Christian worker. And he had slipped back into alcoholism again.

And they got down on their knees. And we said, Lord, we've been very unwise again. And the Christian worker said, look, keep me out of this now.

We. And we should be specific. We shouldn't just confess in generality.

It's so easy to do that. God knows anyway. But he wants to hear the specific sins.

And confession should be also with the intention of forsaking that sin as well. He that confesseth and forsaketh himself shall have mercy. I probably told you here before the man that stole a crate of Bartlett pears.

I said he's pears because I like them. He stole a crate of Bartlett pears. And the Christian worker dealing with him said, now, how much did you steal? He said, well, he said, I stole a crate, but I better make it two because I'm going back after the other crate tonight.

He didn't have any intention of forsaking that sin. We play games, don't we? We play games when we're in the whole area of confession. But it doesn't work.

The first thing is to yield yourself to the Lord. Turn over the controls of your life to him. The second thing is to confess and forsake sin as soon as you're aware that it has come into your life.

1 John 1, 9. I've often said I couldn't live another week as a Christian. If we confess our sins, be faithful and just to forgive us our sins. The cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

A lot of people have difficulty appropriating forgiveness. Did you know that? Do you know there are a lot of men in the assembly today and you never hear their voice? And the reason is because something in their life and they've confessed it to the Lord, but they don't feel forgiven. The Bible never says you will feel forgiven.

It's better to be forgiven than to feel forgiven. And if we do confess, he does, he does forgive. You don't have to ask him to forgive, he just does forgive.

And I think that's wonderful. Get down on your knees, confess your sins, rise up from your knees and believe that God has been true to his words. He is faithful and just.

He's faithful to his promise and he's just. He has a just reason for doing it. And that's the work of Christ to help you.

A righteous way of forgiving your sins. Faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And as I say, confession keeps you clean.

What else? If I'm going to abide, listen, if I'm going to abide in Christ, I'm going to abide in the word of God. I'm going to abide in the Bible. The Bible is going to be the book in my life.

I'm so glad what Jim said about that today. We live in an age that is biblically illiterate. And so-called Bible teachers or preachers, they can come up with the most bizarre things today and people say, isn't that wonderful? I never saw that in the Bible before.

Well, they never saw it because it isn't there. That's why they never saw it. And so you have such ludicrous things as the laughing revival, you know.

It's all in the name of Jesus. It's all in the name of our Savior. And just the world just laughs terribly.

You have people saying that they had a cavity in their teeth and the Lord filled it with new tooth. I mean, why is this? And it isn't just common, ordinary, vanilla-type Christians either. Even our leaders today, evangelical leaders.

Jim's been speaking about Catholicism. One of them says the Pope is a great evangelist. The Pope is a great deceiver.

And he's the head of a church that's drunk with the blood of the people. And yet these men say, well, you know, they're all evangelicals and Catholics together. And they're up there on the platform and the great big stage and all the rest.

Dear friends, we've really departed from it. And if there's one thing, one passion in my life as I go around ministering the Word of God, it's that more than anything else. It's these young people getting into the Word of God.

Serious, just getting into the Word of God. When I was younger, I think even high school, maybe college, I had the naive notion that when I got to heaven I was going to know everything. So why worry about the Bible now? I would know it all when I got to heaven.

One day they asked me if I would take one of the speakers home during the intermission between meetings. And I don't know how we ever got in this conversation, but he made it very clear to me I wouldn't know everything. And he turned to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 7, that in the ages to come he might show what is the exceeding riches of his kindness.

His grace brought us to Christ Jesus. And he said, look, heaven's going to be a school. The Bible's going to be the textbook.

God's going to be the teacher. The term's going to be eternity, and what you know about the Bible. It began to make sense.

He said, well, I thought everybody's going to be happy. Everybody's going to be happy in heaven, but some people will be happier than others. He said, well, everybody's cup's going to be full.

That's right, but some cups will be bigger than others. And your appreciation of Christ and your appreciation of the glories of heaven initially will be what you do with the Bible. One of the pains of living is to see Christian young people spending their lives on the sleeping habits of the Puerto Rican religious or something or the significance of the potluck supper in modern... I mean, that's what they teach, you know, in schools today.

Dear friends, there's something better than that. The word of God, the most precious possession we have today, the most precious possession, the most precious, earthly, tangible, material possession. I would commend it, as Jim did, to you young people.

Get into the word of God so that you can become so familiar with it. I look back and think of assemblies I was brought in, workmen, miners, carpenters, plumbers, electricians. And they would come home at night and they'd get into the word of God and they didn't understand everything they were reading.

But I tell you, they were just bathed in the word of God and great answers. I told Jim coming up here, one of them, I was talking with a Roman Catholic about Mary, you know, the pole redemptress, you know, and how you go to Mary and you get salvation through Mary. And he said, I wouldn't trust my soul, this miner, just a common man, I wouldn't trust my soul to a mother whose son was out of her sight for two or three days and she didn't even know it.

Not bad, huh? I tell you, a degree in a seminary wouldn't do that for you. It wouldn't do that for you. And that word of God, I can't, I can't overemphasize that.

Then prayer, prayer. The work of God is done more in prayer than in any other way. I console myself with the fact that God answers prayer in exactly, every prayer, I believe God answers every prayer in exactly the same way I would answer it if I had his wisdom, love and power.

I have to believe that. Because he's perfect. He does all things well.

And every prayer I pray, when it gets to God the Father, it's perfect. All the refuse has been removed from it, all of the weeds and all of that, and God answers just the way I would. If I knew what he knows, if I loved as he loves, if I, you say, yeah, but I know some prayers that aren't answered.

There was a fellow that had taken up Maharashi and had read all the books. He said, I believe that, I believe that. He said, well, how do you account for the fact that you pray for unsaved people and they don't get saved? God wants them to be saved.

The trouble with people today who aren't saved, it's not in their intellect, it's in their will. Jesus said that. He said, you've searched the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life.

These are they that testify of you and you don't want it. I say, God isn't going to populate heaven with people who don't want to be there. But I believe, on my part, that when I pray for him, God brings something to bear in his life.

Maybe an invitation of the gospel comes. Maybe he passes by and he sees Jesus saved on a rock or something. Maybe somebody, yeah, maybe somebody passes him a tract, you know, like that.

God speaks to him, I believe that. It comes to him to make the choice. And that's true if you're here today and you're unsaved.

There's nothing about Jesus that makes it impossible. He's the most trustworthy person in the universe. You'd be foolish not to believe in him.

All heaven to gain, hell to escape, salvation's free. What can you lose? Your will. You have to break that will.

Service to him. God guides people in motion. He doesn't guide a bicycle when it's standing still.

He guides bicycles in motion and people too. And that's what he wants us to be about, about his business. Abide in me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

What is the fruit here? Well, I guess, first of all, we think of fruit in Galatians chapter 5, the fruit of the Spirit, don't we? You say, well, couldn't it mean service for the Lord? People wonder, Christ, if I wouldn't... The two are very closely connected. Jesus said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Follow me, that's Christ-like life.

I will make you fishers of men. To follow him is to make us fruitful as the result of that service for the Lord. So I wouldn't limit it just to a Christ-like character, but very closely linked with the matter of souls run to him.

A branch just allows itself, allows the life of the vine to flow through it. And that's exactly what it should be in our lives as well. Just allow the life of the Lord Jesus to flow through us.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have said of us what was said of Robert Murray McChain, 29 years old. Somebody said of him, he's the most Christ-like man I've ever met. I don't know any higher tribute he'd ever played.

I am the vine, verse 5, and you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit. Without me you can do nothing.

That's absolutely true. Anything that's ever accomplished through the work of God, to God be the glory. It's all him.

It would be like Jim's writing a book now. It would be about the pen posting. Boy, that's pretty good.

I'm writing that book, Conversations with Catholics, you know. Come on, give me some air. That's not the pen.

The hand that's guiding the pen. Or in this case, the computer. The computer's not got nothing to brag about.

And that's so true in Christian service too. We're nothing. Absolutely nothing.

It's the work of, it's the vine flowing. First of all, I must, time's almost gone, but I must, verse 6. If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch. Oh, we've got a tough one here.

He's cast out as a branch and is withered. They gather them and throw them into the fire and they're burned. Uh-oh.

Here we are back at eternal security again, or the lack thereof. Look at the verse. While I say these things, just look at the verse.

The Lord Jesus did not say that the branch, that the believer is cast out by God and withered. He doesn't say that here, does he? Look carefully. He didn't say that the believer is cast out by God and withered.

Two. He did not say that God gathers them. Three.

He did not say that he casts them into hell. We read things into a verse of Scripture like the verse doesn't say that. If anyone does not abide in me, who's a believer? What's he doing? He's cold in heart.

He's away from the Lord. He's not walking in fellowship with the Lord. He's a backslider.

He's cast out as a branch and is withered. And they gather them. They.

Who's they? It's indefinite, they. Men, you know, are in a genderless society, persons. They gather them and throw them into the fire and they're burned.

What does it say? Well, I think it's saying this. This is just what I believe in. I think David is a good illustration of this verse.

David wasn't abiding in the divine. And he's telling a horrible story.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/11/SID11837.mp3>

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