

## No Greater Love – In Good Fruit <sup>2</sup>

✦ The fruit of perseverance (vv.1-11)

✦ The fruit of forgiveness (vv.12-27)

In the Name of Jesus, God's fruitful Love, dearly redeemed disciples of our Lord:

Vineyards are still seen in the Holy Land with Bible stories back to Noah after the Flood around 2500 B.C. The Holy Spirit used pictures of grape vines and vineyards to teach many lessons to God's people through the prophets. (Isaiah 5:1; Ezekiel 19:10; Psalm 80:8-19) Our dear Lord Jesus does the same for us tonight. We listen with His Twelve disciples on the way to the olive grove at Gethsemane. We find a treasure of wisdom and encouragement that besides Jesus, there is **No Greater Love – In Good Fruit**.

✦ The fruit of perseverance (vv.1-11)

Jesus continues with another **"I AM"** statement showing Himself to be the one true God from all eternity. *"I AM the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he cuts away. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, to make it bear more fruit."*

During my college years I was asked to prune a pear tree. The owner told me after I had cut off as many branches as I thought I should, to go over it again and cut off more. If that pear tree could talk, it would be crying, "What are you doing? Look at all the leafy branches you cut off! I looked so good before, but now I'm a bare stick!" Even after I thought I was done, the owner told me to go over it a third time. "This tree bears beautifully with good pruning." Sure enough, that season was succulent with fruit.

God is not punishing when He prunes us. He delights to produce **Good Fruit** in us by faith. Jesus says: *"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine. Likewise, you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. I AM the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, 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 done for you. In this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and prove yourselves to be my disciples."*

Imagine being a teenager in the Holy Land when God's wrath brought the Babylonian Captivity. Refusing to worship the idols, your three friends were thrown into a fiery furnace, but Jesus kept the fire from singeing their clothes. Years later your fellow rulers hated your success and had you thrown into a lions' den. You persevered in prayer, telling the king, *"My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."* (Daniel 3; 6:22) Daniel persevered by keeping faith in the coming Christ.

Now our Savior shows His unsurpassed love by causing us to bear **Good Fruit** in praise to God. *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love. If you guard and treasure my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have guarded my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."* We guard Christ's commands like Daniel and are still are blessed by **The fruit of perseverance** to this day.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

<sup>2</sup> From Lenten series: *No Greater Love – Our Savior's Passion Sermons*. March-April, 2014 – New Life, Shoreview, MN

## ✠ The fruit of forgiveness (vv.12-27)

Christ's command is so simple: ***“Love one another as I have loved you.”*** Yet how many families can love like Jesus? And what family failed as miserably as Jacob's. He showed favoritism by giving a coat of many colors to Joseph. When Joseph's brothers threw him into a cistern instead of killing him, they said, ***“We'll see what comes of his dreams.”*** How could the whole family bow down to Joseph after he was sold into slavery? The teenage boy was handsome and intelligent. His master's wife tried to seduce him, then falsely accused of rape. What trauma to be forgotten in prison for nearly twenty years! Family hatred and violence instead of love (Genesis 37-40), yet God always keeps His promises.

The Holy Spirit who kindled faith and kept hope alive for Joseph nearly twenty years uses these powerful words of Jesus to produce **The fruit of forgiveness**: ***“No greater love has one than this, to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because everything I heard 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 endure. Then whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. This is what I command you: Love one another.”*** Joseph did not choose to be his father's favorite. Nor can we choose to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus chooses to give us the full blessing of His love – as if there were no one else to love. Because of Jesus, you are God's favorite. So am I. Infinite love loves infinitely to produce **the fruit of forgiveness**.

Thanks to God's grace, Joseph is a great example of this favorite Bible passage: ***“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”*** (Romans 8:28 KJV) When father Jacob died, Joseph's brothers feared his vengeance as Prime Minister of Egypt and pleaded for mercy. Their forgiving brother answered: ***“Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”*** (Genesis 50:19f NIV84) We are still because God kept His promise of a Savior from sin.

But don't expect people to be impressed by all this goodness and love from God. Jesus gave His disciples a reality check: ***“If the world hates you, you know by experience that it hated me first. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Still, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too. If they kept my word, they will keep yours as well. But they will do all these things to you because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me....In this way the word is fulfilled which is written in their Scriptures: ‘They hated me for no reason.’”*** When you follow Jesus, expect hatred from this world and eternal victory from God in Christ.

A pastor wanted to demonstrate Jesus' picture for his congregation. So one Sunday morning he cut a branch from his grape vine and took it to church. But he noticed in only a few minutes before he could even get to church that the vine had withered, dead as could be. So it is for us branches with Jesus the Vine. Lose your connection with Him as a teenager, and you lose the power that propelled Daniel in faith's perseverance and Joseph in faith's forgiveness. God's Word warns that you could lose your faith forever. God would rather have you stay fruitful on the vine even if He needs to prune away some of your leafy friends and sucker branches. But you will always have God's wisdom in His Word. As long as you remain in Jesus, He promises: ***“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup>And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.”***

From youth to old age God wants to bless us with peace in forgiveness and rich fruit of purpose and blessing in our lives. He promises: ***“They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, ‘The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.’”*** (Psalm 92:14f NIV84) Stay as branches on the Vine and enjoy **No Greater Love – In Good Fruit**. Amen.