

Decrease to Increase

If we do not submit to pruning, we shall perish

John 15.1–2

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Jake McNeil – Luke 13.6–9

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – No Suggestions

Prelude:

I. Autumn and winter are no spring and summer.

A. Spring and summer are color and growth.

B. Autumn and winter are dullness and death.

1. Yet, there would be no spring and summer

2. if not for autumn and winter, because

a) to have color and growth,

b) first there has to be dullness and death.

(1) A tree must *decrease*

(2) before it can *increase*.

(a) Likewise, for the tree,

(b) it is prune or perish.

i) For Christians

ii) it is prune or perish.

(1) For congregations

(2) it is prune or perish.

Persuasion:

I. What Would John Do?

A. John 3 shows the disciples of John the Baptizer

B. reporting to him on the popularity of Jesus.

1. Do you know what John said in response?

2. John's response should summarize

- a) the life of a Christian and
- b) the life of a congregation.

30 “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

– John 3.30

- (1) If we increase
 - (a) in things that we should not increase in,
 - (b) Jesus will decrease in us.
- (2) We have no choice then, but
 - (a) to submit
 - (b) to pruning.
 - i) Why do we prune trees, especially fruit trees?
 - ii) Dead or wayward branches have appeared.
 - (1) If we do not cut them off,
 - (2) they hurt the overall health of the tree and
 - (a) fruit production drops off.
 - (b) Disease might set in and destroy the tree.

C. Both people and congregations have the same problems.

- 1. Dead and diseased parts have to be severed.
- 2. It is not a pleasant process.
 - a) Look at the trees of spring and summer and
 - b) their growth and then
 - (1) look at the trees of autumn and winter and
 - (2) their pruning.
 - (a) Pruning is not pretty, but
 - (b) it is healthy.

- i) It appears that the gardener
- ii) wants to destroy something good.
 - (1) Yet, later the tree is better.
 - (2) Pruning decreases the tree
 - (a) that it might increase later.

D. People and churches need decreasing

- 1. from time to time
- 2. that they might increase later.
 - a) We have dead and diseased things, and
 - b) churches have people who are dead and diseased in the spirit.
 - (1) If left in place,
 - (2) the person or the church will die.
 - (a) It is not pretty.
 - (b) Whenever dead and diseased people
 - i) leave a congregation or are disciplined
 - ii) there are people who object, but
 - (1) the church is always better later.
 - (2) When we prune ourselves
 - (a) it is painful but
 - (b) fruitful.

II. Decrease to Increase

- A. Hebrews 12 even argues that without pruning in our lives,
 - 1. we become illegitimate children.
 - 2. The Hebrew writer quoted Proverbs 3, but
 - a) augments Solomon's terminology.

b) Listen to the work of our loving heavenly Father in our lives,

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

**My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;**

**6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.**

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

– Hebrews 12.5–8

- (1) Scourging is severe, but
 - (a) God does it and
 - (b) he expects us to do it
 - i) to ourselves and
 - ii) to our congregations.
- (2) Chastening prunes away the bad stuff.
 - (a) We prune away the bad stuff
 - (b) that growth may begin.

B. In First Corinthians 5,

1. after hearing the Corinthian church boasting
2. that they allowed an immoral member to remain in their congregation,
 - a) Paul commanded them to cut off
 - b) that member from the body of Christ,

**4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,
5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his**

spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

– 1 Corinthians 5.4–7

- (1) We decrease the church
- (2) when we deliver someone to Satan.

c) We do that for two reasons:

- (1) First, we do it for the benefit of the diseased branch.
- (2) Second, we do it to keep it from spreading throughout the church.
 - (a) Paul’s language is harsh,
 - i) “deliver such a one to Satan,”
 - ii) “purge out the old leaven,” and
 - (b) in the last two verses (vv. 12–13), he said,
 - i) we judge those inside the body of Christ, and
 - ii) “put away from yourselves the evil person.”
 - (1) Yet, it brought the immoral member back, and
 - (2) his immorality did not spread.

C. Of course, as David requested of God in the Book of Psalms,

- 1. it is better if we prune ourselves
- 2. rather than having the congregation do it.
 - a) Self-pruning is private,
 - b) so it is less painful.
 - (1) Congregational pruning is public,
 - (2) so very painful.

**7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

– Psalm 51.7

**23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
24 And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.**

– Psalm 139.23–24

D. In Second Corinthians 13,

1. Paul commanded us to see if we need to do some decreasing.
2. Otherwise, Jesus may disqualify us!
 - a) If we do not cut off the diseased parts,
 - b) God will cut us off.

5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

– 2 Corinthians 13.5

- (1) Spend time daily in God's pruning shears,
- (2) otherwise, known as the Bible.
 - (a) If you submit to every word,
 - (b) you will see whether you are in the faith.
 - i) However, we tend to be self-biased.
 - ii) Therefore, submit to teaching and preaching.
 - (1) Submit to people who will tell you the truth
 - (2) about your good points and your bad points.
 - (a) Pruning will be done, but

(b) you will not perish.

E. Jesus explained, as found in John 15,

1. that our heavenly Father is a vinedresser and

2. he does what the grower of a vineyard does.

a) He cuts off problem branches and

b) he prunes the productive ones.

(1) Listen to why Jesus said

(2) his Father does these things.

(a) The process hurts, but

(b) he has our good in mind.

**1 “I am the true vine, and
My Father is the vinedresser.
2 Every branch in Me
that does not bear fruit
He takes away; and
every branch
that bears fruit He prunes,
that it may bear more fruit.”**

– John 15.1–2

i) Why does a farmer plant a vineyard?

(1) Does he want something that looks beautiful?

(2) Does he enjoy the hard work?

ii) Vineyards are beautiful and the farmer likes hard work, but

(1) he wants the fruit

(2) that he might make a profit.

(a) God wants the fruit

(b) that he might make a profit,

(c) preventing Satan from getting the profit.

3. Isaiah 5 comes right out and
 - a) tells us why God wants a vineyard.
 - b) He speaks first of Israel, but
 - (1) look at the work he performs and
 - (2) what he expects from it.
 - (a) What he said of Israel,
 - (b) John 15 shows he would say of the church also.

**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.**

**2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
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.**

– Isaiah 5.1–2

- i) Verses 3–7 go on to show what God would do to Israel
 - ii) for not bearing the right kind of fruit, because
 - (1) Israel refused to submit to God’s pruning.
 - (2) If we will not prune ourselves or
 - (a) if we will not prune within the congregation,
 - (b) God will tear up the vineyard!
- F. Luke 13 shows a grower at work.
1. Like the grower in this parable,
 2. watch a farmer tenderly care for his orchard or vineyard.
 - a) Yet, when problems arise,

- b) he does what he can
 - (1) to rescue the plant,
 - (2) otherwise, he cuts it down and burns it:

6 He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ 8 But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’”

– Luke 13.6–9

- (a) The parable illustrated what God does and
- (b) how he works with us, both
 - i) individually and
 - ii) congregationally.
 - (1) Therefore, do something
 - (2) before *he does*.

G. Revelation 2 and 3 shows the same thing.

1. What Jesus said to the Ephesian church typifies
2. what he said to the majority of the churches.
 - a) He works with people and congregations,
 - b) even as the keeper of the vineyard and the owner of the vineyard did
 - (1) in the parable in Luke 13, but
 - (2) Jesus will also do as the keeper of the vineyard told the owner
 - (a) that if the tree failed to produce,
 - (b) he could cut it down and burn it.

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

– Revelation 2.5

Exhortation:

I. Do not wait for that day to arrive.

- A. Do something about your life now.
- B. Cut off the diseased parts.
 - 1. It is better to enter heaven
 - 2. missing something,
 - a) then to enter hell
 - b) with everything in place.

II. When the congregation has to prune,

- A. support it.
- B. We all thrive when our home congregation is healthy.

III. What do you need?