



BRANCH PRAYING

IT is as the child of God lives that they pray. It is the life that prays. It is the life that, with wholehearted devotion, gives up all for God and to God that can claim all from God. Our God longs exceedingly to prove Himself the Faithful God and Mighty Helper of His people. He only waits for hearts wholly turned from the world to Himself, and open to receive His gifts.

The man who loses all will find all; he dare ask and take it. The branch that only and truly lives abiding in Christ, the Heavenly Vine, entirely given up, like Christ, to bear fruit in the salvation of men, and has His words taken up into and abiding in its life, may and dare ask what it will—it shall be done.

And where we have not yet attained to that full devotion to which our Lord had —nevertheless, take courage in remembering that, even in the lower stages of the Christian life, every new onward step in the striving after the perfect branch life, and every surrender to live for others in intercession, will be met from above by a corresponding liberty to draw nigh with greater boldness, and expect larger answers. The more we pray, and the more conscious we become of our unfitness to pray in power, the more we shall be urged and helped to press on towards the secret of power in prayer—a life abiding in Christ entirely at His disposal.

And if any are asking, with somewhat of a despair of attainment, what the reason may be of the failure in this blessed branch life, so simple and yet so mighty, and how they can come to it, let me point them to one of the most precious lessons of the parable of the Vine. It is one that is all too little noticed. Jesus spake, "I am the true Vine, *and my Father is the Husbandman.*" We have not only Himself, the glorified Son of God, in His divine fullness, out of whose fullness of life and grace we can draw,—this is very wonderful,—but there is something more blessed still.

We have the Father, as the Husbandman, watching over our abiding in the Vine, over our growth and fruit-bearing. It is not left to our faith or our faithfulness to maintain our union with Christ: the God, who is the Father of Christ, and who united us with Him,—God Himself will see to it that the branch is what it should be, will enable us to bring forth just the fruit we were appointed to bear. Hear what Christ said of this, "Every branch that beareth fruit, He cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit." More fruit is what the Father seeks; more fruit is what the Father will Himself provide. It is for this that He, as the Vinedresser, cleanses the branches.

Just think a moment what this means. It is said that of all fruit-bearing plants on earth there is none that produces fruit so full of spirit, from which spirit can be so abundantly distilled, as the vine. And of all fruit-bearing plants there is none that is so ready to run into wild wood, and for which pruning and cleansing are so indispensable.

The one great work that a vinedresser has to do for the branch every year is to prune it. Other plants can for a time dispense with it, and yet bear fruit: the vine *must* have it. And so the one thing the branch that desires to abide in Christ and bring forth much fruit, and to be able to ask whatsoever it will, must do, is to trust in and yield itself to this Divine cleansing. What is it that the vinedresser cuts away with his pruning-knife? Nothing but the wood that the branch has produced—true, honest wood, with the true vine nature in it. This must be cut away. And why? Because it draws away the strength and life of the vine, and hinders the flow of the juice to the grape. The more it is cut down, the less wood there is in the branch, the more all the sap can go to the grape.

The wood of the branch must decrease, that the fruit for the vine may increase; in obedience to the law of all nature, that death is the way to life, that gain comes through sacrifice, the rich and luxuriant growth of wood must be cut off and cast away, that the life more abundant may be seen in the cluster.

Even so, child of God, branch of the Heavenly Vine, there is in thee that which appears perfectly innocent and legitimate, and which yet so draws out thy interest and thy strength that it must be pruned and cleansed away. We saw what power in prayer men like Abraham and Moses and Elijah had, and we know what fruit they bore. But we also know what it cost them; how God had to separate them from their surroundings, and ever again to draw them from any trust in themselves, to seek their life in Him alone. It is only as our own will, and strength and effort and pleasure, even where these appear perfectly natural and sinless, are cut down, so that the whole energies of our being are free and open to receive the sap of the Heavenly Vine, the Holy Spirit, that we shall bear much fruit.

It is in the surrender of what nature holds fast, it is in the full and willing submission to God's holy pruning-knife, that we shall come to what Christ chose and appointed us for—to bear fruit, that whatsoever we ask the Father in Christ's name, He may give to us.

What the pruning-knife is, Christ tells us in the next verse. "Ye are *clean through the word* which I have spoken to you." As He says later, "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth." "The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit." What heart-searching words Christ had spoken to His disciples on love and humility, on being the least, and, like Himself, the servant of all, on denying self, and taking the cross, and losing the life.

Through His word the Father had cleansed them, cut away all confidence in themselves or the world, and prepared them for the inflowing and filling of the Spirit of the Heavenly Vine. It is not we who can cleanse ourselves: God is the Vinedresser: we may confidently entrust ourselves to His care.

Beloved brethren,—ministers, missionaries, teachers, workers, believers old and young,—are you mourning your lack of prayer, and, as a consequence, your lack of power in prayer? Oh! Come and listen to your beloved Lord as He tells you, "only be a branch, united to, identified with, the Heavenly Vine, and your prayers will be effectual and much availing."

Are you mourning that just this is your trouble—you do not, cannot, live this branch-life, abiding in Him? Oh! Come and listen again. "*More fruit*" is not only your desire, but the Father's too. He is the Husbandman who cleanseth the fruitful branch, that it may bear more fruit. Cast yourself upon God, to do in you what is impossible to man. Count upon a Divine cleansing, to cut down and take away all that self-confidence and self-effort that has been the cause of your failure. The God who gave you His beloved Son to be your Vine, who made you His branch, will He not do His work of cleansing to make you fruitful in every good work, in the work of prayer and intercession too?

Here is the life that can pray. A branch entirely given up to the Vine and its aims, with all responsibility for its cleansing cast on the Vinedresser; a branch abiding in Christ, trusting and yielding to God for His cleansing, can bear much fruit. In the power of such a life we shall love prayer, we shall know how to pray, ***we shall pray, and receive whatsoever we ask.***

John 15:7⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. KJV

¹³ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

¹⁴ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. John 14:13-14

**23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you,
Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give *it* you.**

**24 Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive,
that your joy may be full. John 16: 23-24**

The Ministry of Intercession: A Plea for More Prayer by Andrew Murray