

WE ARE ALL PARASITES ON JESUS!

Today's Text: Jn 15: 1- 27

Extracts:

“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. 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 you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” [Jn 15: 4-8]

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Perth, Australia, 28-30 October 2011, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, threatened to withhold UK aid from governments that do not reform legislation banning homosexuality.¹ About 41 nations within the 54-member organization have laws to that effect and the bulk of such countries are in Africa where cultural and religious views on the matter are deeply held. Reacting to the threat, a Ugandan presidential adviser told the BBC that the UK should stop treating Ugandans “like children,” while the President of Ghana, John Atta Mills, rejected the threat, saying that the UK could not impose its values on Ghana. Meanwhile, the Nigerian National Assembly has gone ahead at full speed to enact a law to ban same-sex marriage and penalize anyone aiding or abetting it.

The UK threat deeply affects bilateral aid known as general annual budget support. Recently, Malawi lost £19 m (US\$30.4 m) such aid, a significant proportion of its annual budget. So, while some countries like Uganda and Malawi may be scared, others like Ghana and Nigeria may not be bothered. Why? It is because the first group needs the UK like parasites, that is, those living off the generosity of others while offering little or nothing in return. Nigeria and Ghana, on the other hand, are oil producing nations with huge domestic markets and the UK needs them more than they need her. In this week's Bible text, Jesus “threatened” His followers that without Him, they can do nothing. In that sense, believers are parasites on Jesus! But what kind of parasite are you? Are you a mere sucker of His largesse or a productive partner in the kingdom of God on earth? Those issues and more will be examined in this week's exciting study.

¹ Story based on the following sources: “Cameron threat to dock some UK aid to anti-gay nations,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15511081>, 31 Oct. 2011; “Uganda fury at David Cameron aid threat over gay rights,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15524013>; 31 Oct. 2011; and “Ghana refuses to grant gay rights despite aid threat,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15558769>; 2 Nov. 2011.

1. Background: Living on or living off Jesus?

The mistletoe plant is a well-known parasite that can be found on host trees in tropical and temperate forests.² In the case of tropical mistletoes, for example, fruit-eating birds distribute mistletoe seeds in their droppings or by wiping their beaks (to which the seeds often adhere) on the bark of a tree. The seeds germinate and grow by penetrating the bark of the host tree and forcing a connection through which water and nutrients pass from host to parasite. Mistletoes are slow-growing but persistent and their natural death is determined by the death of the host. Therefore, the only effective way to control the spread of mistletoes is to remove them from the host.

In this week's Bible text, Jesus told His listeners, "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" [Jn 15: 5]. Ordinarily, a vine is a climbing plant that grows quickly and can be very useful for walls and fences. Examples are grapes, bougainvillea or even the Poison Ivy.³ However, *in the context of our study, the vine represents the sap, the fluid that transports water and nutrients throughout a plant. Clearly, the branches of any tree depend on food supplies from the sap for their survival.* So, if Jesus is that vine and we are the branches, we are parasites on Him. However, unlike the mistletoe plant that can suck its host to death, we cannot kill Jesus! Without Him, we can do nothing. We cannot survive. That is why we need to understand what Jesus has to teach us on this vital subject.

Let us pay attention to the following aspects:

a) *Jesus chose you; you did not choose Him!*

Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" [Jn 15: 16]. The tree that a mistletoe plant parasitizes did not choose to host it. It was by chance that a bird or other agents deposited mistletoe seeds on the bark of such a host tree. In the case of Jesus, He chose to host you. It was not by chance. Does that make sense to you?

The word of God says that He demonstrates His own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us [Rom. 5: 8]. Sinners, like criminals, are always running away from justice. Just as it is law enforcement agents who find criminals, so also it is Jesus (the only begotten Son of God sent to save the world from sin [Jn 3: 16-17]) that finds sinners and brings them out of their hiding places in brothels, gangs, gambling and money laundering hideouts, and so on. Just as it is the employer that puts up an advertisement for new employees from whom a

² "The Mistletoe (plant)," Encyclopaedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/385828/mistletoe>

³ "Vine," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vine>

few applicants are selected and interviewed, so also many are called by Jesus but few are chosen [**Matt. 22: 14**]. Therefore, you must consider it a very rare privilege when Jesus invites you to be a branch on the true vine.

b) *Therefore, Jesus is the vine and you are the branch*

He told His listeners, “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” [**Jn 15: 5**]. The mistletoe plant has a mind of its own even as a parasite on a host tree. It exploits the host for its own selfish benefit. For example, it even contains chlorophyll that enables it to make some of its own food. But in the case of Jesus as your Host, He did not choose you for you to use Him for your selfish ends but for His mission. That is why He has stated upfront the conditions under which you can be a branch on His vine, some of which are as follows:

- ***You must abide in Him and His words must abide in you [v. 7].*** His words (for today’s believer) can be found in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, not selective quotes that justify your whims and caprices. It is only when you believe in Him and obey His words that you can ask what you desire and “it shall be done for you” so that His Father can be glorified and you will become His disciple [**vv. 7-8**];
- ***You must love one another as He has loved you so that His joy may remain in you and be full [vv. 9-12].*** To love others is to forgive everyone that hurts you, even when they refuse to apologize! It means that you bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you [**Matt. 5: 43-44**]. It means working for others as if you are working for yourself [**Lk 16: 12**]. It means doing in secret what you do in public [**Matt. 23: 27-28**]. A tree is known by its fruits [**Matt. 12: 33-37**].
- ***You must be ready to be the friend of Jesus.*** His friend is the person who does whatever He commands him/her to do [**Jn 15: 13-14**]. You will become greater than a mere servant because a servant does not know what his master is doing. However, as His friend, Jesus has made known to you all things that He has heard from His Father [**v. 15**].
- ***You must be prepared for persecution*** because the world hated Him before He chose you. As His follower, the world will also hate you because you are no longer of the world [**vv. 18-25**]. Happily, He has sent the Helper, the Holy Spirit of truth, from His Father. He has testified of Jesus and you have been strengthened to be a true witness of Jesus, the True Vine [**vv. 26-27**].

c) *But His Father is the vinedresser!*

Jesus also reminded His listeners, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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” [vv. 1-2]. The mistletoe plant dies only when its host dies or when the gardener plucks it off the host. In your own case, you cannot kill Jesus- at least, not again because He has already died once for your sins on the cross at Calvary. Therefore, when you try to be a mere sucker, not bearing any of the good fruits listed above, His Father, the vinedresser, will take your branch away. So, there is a limit to living off Jesus while living on Him.

However, *those who bear the desirable good fruits will not be immune from pain. God will not allow you to become complacent or be content with producing only low-lying fruits. Occasionally, He will shake up your comfort zone so as to make you soar to higher levels of spiritual growth and blessings. He will prune your wild growth of arrogance or laziness to let you know that without Jesus, you can do nothing!* He allowed Satan to shake up Job’s faith and that enabled Job to discover his inadequacies when he confessed, saying, “I have uttered what I did not understand... Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” [Job 42: 3-6]. God allowed the persecution of the early church, especially the martyrdom of Stephen, one of the seven deacons appointed by the apostles, so as to scatter His disciples ‘everywhere preaching the word’ [Acts 8:4]. That way, Christ’s commission to “make disciples of all the nations” was put in motion [Matt. 28: 19].

From the forgoing, we can conclude that *we are indeed parasites on Jesus because without Him, we can of ourselves do nothing. Salvation is by His grace, not by our own effort. Therefore, we must learn to let go and let Him lead our lives as God wants it. Yet, we need to bear spiritual fruits because by them we shall be known* [Matt. 7: 15-20; Gal. 5: 22-23]. What kind of parasite have you been?

2. What kind of parasite are you?

You may be the only Bible that people around you are reading. For example, when Peter and John were brought for trial before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, we are told that when the Jewish leaders “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” [Acts 4: 13]. They did not go to college at all, not to talk of Bible college. They had been mere fishermen who had been transformed by the Helper, the Holy Spirit promised them by Jesus. That is what Jesus has also promised you when He told His

listeners, “You also will bear witness because you have been with Me from the beginning” [Jn 15: 27].

So, what kind of parasite have you been on Jesus? Here are some common profiles from our various places of worship:

a) You may be a snatch-and-run ingrate!

Some people come to Jesus because of the material blessings that they can receive from Him. For example, some people came to receive healing where their physicians had failed. Some have come because they were under demonic attacks. But as soon as they have received their blessings, they run back to their comfort zones like dogs that snatch bones and run to safe corners to relish their steal. Sooner than later, hunger will return and you will need Jesus once more! Jesus said to the multitudes that came looking for Him after He had miraculously fed five thousand people with a few barley loaves and fish, “You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” [Jn 6: 26].

Examine your motives as you jump from one revival service to another or as you change denominations from one to a more popular one, or as you scheme for politically motivated promotions to higher ranks in your place of worship. Are you labouring for ephemeral blessings that will perish or for the food that endures to everlasting life which only Jesus can give [v. 27]? Simon the sorcerer was more interested in power than salvation to enable him to maintain the false impression with the people of Samaria as “the great power of God.” Following the ministry of Philip, one of the seven deacons appointed by the apostles, the sorcerer supposedly gave his life to Christ. But when Peter came there and the sorcerer saw that new believers received the Holy Spirit through Peter laying hands on them, he offered Peter money, saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” Peter cursed him and told him that the gift of God could not be purchased with money [Acts 8: 9-20]. Those who have such branches cannot abide in Jesus and His Father, the vinedresser, will cut them off and throw them into the fire where they will be burned [Jn 15: 6].

b) Or you may be the lottery winner!

Some people are just in church, playing for luck. They are not sure (by faith) if there is a heaven or a hell but it is better to hedge- just in case! Just as gamblers squander a great deal of their resources before ultimately winning, lottery winners in the church believe that making heaven depends on their own personal effort and investments for which they believe they deserve reward from God. For example, in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray, the Pharisee

stood up boldly and prayed with himself, saying, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as [that] tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” Jesus taught us from that parable that the Pharisee would be humbled because he exalted himself before God [**Lk 18: 9-14**].

Salvation cannot be earned. It is by grace through faith lest we all should boast to be self-made [**Eph. 2: 8**]. The mistletoe may make its own food because it contains chlorophyll but it dies when its host dies. Jesus is the vine and you are a mere branch. If you do not bear fruits meet for the standards of the kingdom of God, you will wither and God the vinedresser will cut you off and cast you into the fire to be burned. God does not need your goods because He made the world and all that is in it. Therefore, if He were hungry, He would not ask you [**Ps. 50: 12**]! How then can you impress Him?

c) Or the productive partner?

Jesus chose you to make you a productive partner, to go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, so that His Father will grant you whatever you ask Him in the name of Jesus [**Jn 15: 16**]. That means that you should not be a mere sucking parasite, living on and off Jesus, without giving something back in return. The harvest is ripe but the labourers are few. Jesus said we should pray His Father to bring labourers into His vineyard [**Matt. 9: 37-38**]. Why are you not one of them?

Clearly, there is so much you can do. Get off your padded pews and work for God. Stop complaining that there is nobody to pray for you when you should be praying for others. Clean the toilets if you cannot buy the toilet rolls! The harvest is ripe but the labourers are few. Submit your résumé (CV) today!

3. Conclusion: You are privileged to be chosen!

By accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, He has guaranteed your salvation in His Father’s house. In return, you should join the rest of the labourers in the vineyard- as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers [**Eph. 4: 11**]. ***For salvation, you are a parasite on Jesus- same as all believers. But your relationship with Him should be symbiotic, that is, mutually rewarding. Jesus has blessed you with salvation; you should bless Him with your fruitful service in His Father’s vineyard.*** That is the message from this week’s study.

You are privileged to be chosen. Don’t blow it!