

050321 PASTOR DAVE'S SERMON: "THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES."

>> Pastor Dave: GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU FROM GOD THE FATHER AND OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.

LET'S JOIN OUR HEARTS IN PRAYER.

HEAVENLY FATHER, MAY THE WORDS OF MY LIPS AND THE MEDITATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE PLEASING UNTO THEE, OUR LORD, OUR GOD, OUR ROCK, AND OUR SALVATION.

AMEN.

I REALLY APPRECIATE THIS PART OF I EXALTED AND WE EXALTED THEE BECAUSE IT IS PART OF COMMUNITY.

AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT JESUS IS TALKING ABOUT IN OUR GOSPEL READING FOR TODAY, SAYING HE IS THE VINE AND WE ARE THE BRANCHES.

I'M GOING TO GET INTO IT A LITTLE MORE LATER ON IN MY MESSAGE, BUT I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU AN AFRICAN PROVERB THAT SPEAKS TO THIS POINT.

IT SAYS: "I AM BECAUSE WE ARE."

YOU GOT THAT?

"I AM BECAUSE WE ARE."

THERE WAS SOME TALK ABOUT IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD; IT TAKES A VILLAGE FOR US TO BE IN COMMUNITY. THIS IS WHAT GOD HAD IN MIND WHEN HE SAID, IT IS NOT GOOD FOR MAN TO BE ALONE.

WE SHOULD BE TOGETHER.

AND THAT'S WHAT WE ARE TODAY.

ALTHOUGH IN THIS LIMITED SENSE, WE ARE TOGETHER HERE FOR THE WORD OF GOD.

WHEN YOU HEARD THIS GOSPEL READING FOR TODAY, IT SEEMS A LITTLE HARSH, DOES IT NOT?

HE IS GOING TO CUT OUT SOME THINGS AND THROW THEM INTO THE FIRE.

THAT'S A PRETTY HARSH GARDENER, RIGHT?

AND THE ONES THAT ARE BEARING FRUIT, HE IS GOING TO CUT ON THEM, TOO.

IF WE'RE NOT VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT LANGUAGE, WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT HEBREW WRITINGS, THE IDEA OF THE VINEYARD MAY BE FRESH IN OUR MINDS, BUT TO THE JEWS THAT HEARD JESUS SPEAK THIS, IT WAS ANYTHING BUT FRESH.

FOR GOD HAD USED THE IMAGE OF A VINEYARD OVER AND OVER AND OVER.

I'M GOING TO SHARE A FEW OF THEM WITH YOU FROM ISAIAH 5:1-7: "I WILL SING FOR THE ONE I LOVE A SONG ABOUT HIS VINEYARD.

MY LOVED ONE HAD A VINEYARD ON A FERTILE HILLSIDE.

HE DUG IT UP, CLEARED IT OF STONES, AND PLANTED IT WITH THE CHOICEST VINES.

HE BUILT A WATCH-TOWER IN IT, AND CUT OUT A WINE PRESS AS WELL.

THEN HE LOOKED FOR A CROP OF GOOD GRAPES, BUT IT YIELDED ONLY BAD FRUIT.

NOW, YOU DWELLERS IN JERUSALEM AND PEOPLE OF JUDAH JUDGE BETWEEN ME AND MY VINEYARD.

WHAT MORE COULD HAVE BEEN DONE FOR MY VINEYARD THAN WHAT I HAVE DONE FOR IT?

WHEN I LOOKED FOR GOOD GRAPES, WHY DID IT YIELD ONLY BAD?

NOW I WILL TELL YOU WHAT I AM GOING TO DO TO MY VINEYARD.

I WILL TAKE AWAY ITS HEDGE,

AND IT WILL BE DESTROYED.

I WILL BREAK DOWN ITS WALL, AND IT WILL BE TRAMPLED.
I WILL MAKE IT A WASTELAND, NEITHER PRUNED NOR CULTIVATED, AND BRIARS AND THORNS
WILL GROW THERE.
I WILL COMMAND THE CLOUDS NOT TO RAIN ON IT.
THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD ALMIGHTY IS THE NATION OF ISRAEL, AND THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH
ARE THE VINES THAT HE DELIGHTED IN.
AND HE LOOKED FOR JUSTICE BUT SAW BLOODSHED.
HE LOOKED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS BUT HEARD CRIES OF DISTRESS."
WOW!
THE VINEYARD WAS WHAT GOD CHOSE AS AN INSTRUMENT TO GET HIS WORD OUT.
GOD HAD TAKEN ABRAM OUT OF JUST PEOPLE BECAUSE IT PLEASED HIM, TO REVEAL HIMSELF
TO THEM.
HE MADE ABRAM A FATHER OF MANY, MANY NATIONS, THE JEWISH NATION, SO THAT THEY
WOULD BE A BLESSING TO THOSE THAT THEY CAME IN CONTACT WITH, BUT THEY WEREN'T.
THERE IS GOING TO COME A TIME, PEOPLE, WHEN GOD IS GOING TO RUN OUT OF ONE PLAN.
NOW, DOES THIS MEAN THAT WE'RE LIVING IN A WASTELAND?
NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT IT MEANS.
BECAUSE GOD HAD ANOTHER IDEA.
HE SENT JESUS CHRIST.
HE SENT JESUS CHRIST TO BE THE VINE.
HE NO LONGER COUNTED ON US TO BE THE VINE, BUT JUST FOR US TO BE BRANCHES THAT
ARE GROWING OUT OF THE VINE.
HERE IS ANOTHER VERSE FOR YOU, JEREMIAH 2:21: "I PLANTED YOU LIKE A CHOICE VINE OF
SOUND AND RELIABLE STOCK.
HOW THEN DID YOU TURN AGAINST ME INTO A CORRUPT AND WILD VINE?"
EZEKIEL 19: "YOUR MOTHER" -- WHICH IS A METAPHOR FOR ISRAEL -- "WAS LIKE A VINE IN
YOUR VINEYARD, PLANTED BY THE WATER.
IT WAS FRUITFUL AND FULL OF BRANCHES BECAUSE OF ABUNDANT WATER.
IT'S BRANCHES WERE STRONG, FIT FOR A RULER'S SEPTOR.
IT TOWERED HIGH AMONG THE THICK FOLIAGE, CONSPICUOUS FOR ITS HEIGHT AND FOR ITS
MANY BRANCHES.
BUT IT WAS UPROOTED IN THEORY AND THROWN TO THE GROUND.
THE EAST WIND MADE IT SHRIVEL, AND IT WAS STRIPPED OF ITS FRUIT.
ITS STRONG BRANCHES WITHERED AND FIRE CONSUMED THEM."
IT GOES ON, HOSEA 10, PSALM 80, ISAIAH 27, EZEKIEL 15, TIME AFTER TIME AFTER TIME GOD IS
SHOWING HOW UNFAITHFUL WE HAVE BEEN, BUT WE DON'T NEED OLD TESTAMENT
PROPHETS TO TELL US THAT, DO WE?
BECAUSE WE'VE GOT IT RIGHT HERE.
WE KNOW HOW UNFAITHFUL WE CAN BE.
WE KNOW HOW LACK WE CAN BE IN DOING THE THINGS THAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO,
AND YET AT THE SAME TIME GOD LOVES US.
IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW, JESUS TELLS A PARABLE AGAINST THE PHARISEES.
HE SAYS IT IS A VINEYARD PARABLE.

HE SAYS THERE WAS THIS GREAT VINEYARD THAT WAS PLANTED, AND GOD HAD PROVIDED EVERYTHING THERE FOR IT, AND HE RENTED IT OUT TO SOME SHARE CROPPERS.

AND WHEN IT CAME TIME TO COLLECT THE HARVEST, HE SENT HIS SERVANTS, WHICH REPRESENT THE PROPHETS,

THE SHARE CROPPERS, WHICH REPRESENT THE PHARISEES, AND THE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE OF THAT DAY -- KILLED THE PROPHETS.

SO THE OWNER SAID, I KNOW WHAT I'LL DO, I'LL SEND MY SON.

SURELY THEY WILL RESPECT MY SON.

BUT THEY TOOK HIS SON OUTSIDE OF THE VINEYARD AND KILLED HIM, TOO.

AND THEN JESUS ASKED THE PHARISEES, WHAT WILL THE OWNER DO?

THE PHARISEES SAYS SURELY THE OWNER WILL COME AND BRING A BITTER END TO THOSE RETCHES.

JESUS SAID, "YOU HAVE SAID IT YOURSELVES, BECAUSE CHRIST WAS THE ONE SON THAT WAS SENT THAT WAS TAKEN OUTSIDE THE CITY OF JERUSALEM AND CRUCIFIED."

IT IS INTERESTING TO ME HOW THIS IDEA OF A VINE METAPHOR PRESENTS ITSELF, BECAUSE IT IS QUITE DIFFERENT THAN THE WAY PAUL PRESENTS THE CHURCH.

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, JESUS IS THE VINE AND WE ARE THE BRANCHES.

WE ARE EXACTLY SIMILAR.

THAT'S THE WAY THE CHURCH SHOULD FUNCTION, ACCORDING TO JOHN'S VERSION.

FRUITFULNESS DEPENDS ONLY UPON CONNECTION TO THE VINE AND NOTHING ELSE.

FRUITFULNESS IS BASED ON CONNECTION TO THE VINE AND NOTHING ELSE.

IT IS NOT A CHARISMATIC PASTOR.

IT IS NOT BIG SCREENS.

IT IS NOT A WONDERFUL BAND.

IT'S NOT A BEAUTIFUL SANCTUARY.

IT IS NOT ALL KINDS OF DIFFERENT PROGRAMS.

IT'S ABOUT BEING CONNECTED TO CHRIST.

AND THAT'S WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO GO TO A CHURCH THAT PREACHES THE TRUE WORD OF GOD, BECAUSE THAT'S WHERE THE POWER IS.

THAT'S WHERE THE STRENGTH IS.

THAT'S HOW WE CONNECT OURSELVES TO THE VINE WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST.

IT FURTHER TELLS US THAT FRUITFULNESS, OR LACK OF FRUITFULNESS, IS THE ONLY DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN THE BRANCHES: ONE BEARS FRUIT AND ONE DOES NOT.

THERE IS NO DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN CLERGY AND LAY; THERE IS NO DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE, BETWEEN YOUNG AND OLD, BETWEEN JEW AND GENTILE, SLAVE OR FREE -- THERE IS NO DIFFERENTIATION AT ALL.

THIS TEXT STICKS TO MAKING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING.

AND THE MAIN THING IS: ARE YOU BEARING FRUIT?

THIRDLY, EACH BRANCH IS IDENTICAL TO THE OTHERS.

LIKE I SAID BEFORE.

YOU LOOK AT A FOREST, AND YOU JUST SEE ALL OF THE TREES.

IF YOU SEE ONE TREE THAT IS DIFFERENT, IT REALLY STANDS OUT, RIGHT?

ONE OLD TREE THAT GOT HIT BY LIGHTNING AND IT IS ALL BROWN NOW OR SOMETHING, IT STANDS OUT IN THAT FIELD OF GREEN.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE VINE AND ALL OF THE BRANCHES, IT IS HARD TO DISTINGUISH WHERE ONE ENDS AND ONE BEGINS.

THAT'S HOW WE ARE TO BE IN COMMUNITY.

WE ARE TO BE IN COMMUNITY BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO BE SHARING WITH ONE ANOTHER WHAT HE HAS SO FREELY GIVEN TO US IN THE FIRST PLACE.

CONTRAST THAT TO THE WAY PAUL DESCRIBES THE CHURCH.

PAUL DESCRIBES INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL GIFTS THAT WE RECEIVE THAT DIFFERENTIATE US, ONE FROM THE OTHER.

PAUL SPEAKS ABOUT BEING DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BODY.

THE CHURCH IS ONE BODY, BUT THERE IS A HAND, THERE IS A FOOT, THERE IS AN ELBOW, THERE IS A KNEE -- THERE ARE ALL THESE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BODY THAT MAKE UP THE ONE BODY THAT IS CHRIST.

JOHN DOESN'T GO FOR ALL OF THAT.

HE IS JUST EMPHASIZING -- AND HE IS NOT SAYING PAUL IS WRONG, HE IS JUST TELLING US SOMETHING DIFFERENT HERE, ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT IT.

THE WAY THAT JOHN IS LOOKING AT IT IS THAT WE ARE ALL THE SAME.

WE ARE ALL EQUAL.

WE ARE ALL CONNECTED TO THE VINE, AND TO THE DEGREE THAT WE ARE CONNECTED TO THE VINE WILL DETERMINE HOW MUCH WE CAN PRODUCE FRUIT OR NOT PRODUCE FRUIT.

HE GOES ON TO SAY IN VERSE 3 THAT YOU'RE ALREADY CLEAN.

IT IS A PASSIVE VERB.

IT IS NOT SOMETHING THAT WE'VE DONE TO MAKE OURSELVES CLEAN, BUT GOD HAS DONE THAT THROUGH HIS WORD, AND HE CONTINUES TO SAY THAT.

YOU ARE ALREADY CLEAN TO THE WORD THAT WAS SPOKEN TO YOU, THE LOGOS THAT WAS SPOKEN TO YOU.

YOU KNOW, JOHN BEGINS HIS GOSPEL, JOHN 1:1: "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, THE WORD WAS GOD."

THEN HE DROPS DOWN TO VERSE 14, AND HE SAID: "THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US."

ISN'T THAT COOL?

TO THINK THAT GOD WOULD LEAVE HEAVEN AND DWELL AMONG US, JUST TO BE ONE OF US. AS AMAZING AS THAT IS, HE TAKES IT A STEP FURTHER.

HE TELLS US NOW THAT HE IS THE VINE AND WE ARE THE BRANCHES.

NOT ONLY IS HE DWELLING AMONG US, BUT HE IS DWELLING WITHIN US.

HE CHANGES US FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

THROUGH THE HEARING OF HIS WORD, GOD LIVES IN US.

TO THE RECEIVING OF THE BREAD AND THE WINE AND THE WATERS OF OUR BAPTISM, AND THE FELLOWSHIP THAT WE SHARE WITH ONE ANOTHER, CHRIST IS NOT ONLY AMONG US, BUT HE IS IN US.

AND TO THAT EXTENT, AND TO THAT EXTENT ONLY, IS HOW WE'RE GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN BEARING FRUIT.

NOTICE I DIDN'T SAY PRODUCE FRUIT.

WE'RE NOT CALLED TO MAKE IT.

GOD MAKES IT; WE JUST BEAR IT.

AND THAT'S OUR ONLY JOB.
OUR ONLY JOB IS TO BEAR FRUIT.
SO WHAT IS IT?
WHAT IS IT -- WHAT IS FRUIT?
WELL, IF YOU TAKE AN APPLE AND YOU PUT IT IN THE GROUND, AND ALL THINGS WORK OUT
WELL, WHAT GROWS?
NECTARINES?
AN APPLE TREE, RIGHT?
SO COULD ONE SAY THE FRUIT OF A BELIEVER IS ANOTHER BELIEVER?
COULD WE SAY THAT?
HOW DO WE GET TO THAT POINT?
I'M GLAD YOU ALL AGREE BECAUSE I THINK SO, TOO.
THE FRUIT OF A BELIEVER IS ANOTHER BELIEVER, WHICH IS VERY PLEASING TO GOD.
BECAUSE HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF DARKNESS?
WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE THERE ARE SO MANY DISTRACTIVE VOICES THAT ARE CALLING
OUT TO US, CLAMORING FOR OUR ATTENTION, IT IS HARD TO STAY FOCUSED.
AND IT IS SO EASY, BECAUSE SOME OF THEM SOUND SO SIMILAR TO THE GOSPEL, BUT IT IS SO
DIFFERENT THAT IT WILL MISLEAD YOU AND TAKE YOU DOWN A PATH.
AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU LOOK BACK AND GO, OH, MAN, I'M SO FAR AWAY FROM
WHERE I SHOULD BE.
HOW DID I GET THIS WAY?
I REMEMBER AS A KID GOING TO THE BEACH, GOING OUT AND STARTED BODY SURFING, AND
PRETTY SOON THE LIFEGUARD IS SAYING, PUT YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND AND WALK TO
YOUR LEFT, BECAUSE I'M GETTING INTO A RIP AREA.
AND MY PARENTS ARE WAY DOWN THERE.
HOW DID IT HAPPEN?
WAVE AFTER WAVE, LITTLE BIT BY LITTLE BIT.
I WAS BEING MOVED DOWN BY THE TIDE.
IT HAPPENS WITHOUT YOU EVEN KNOWING IT.
THAT'S WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT WE REMAIN ROOTED AND PLANTED FIRMLY IN THE
WORD OF GOD, THAT WE HAVE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND FRIENDS THAT CAN HOLD US
ACCOUNTABLE, THAT WE CAN BE HONEST WITH THEM, THAT WE COME TO A PLACE THAT
PREACHES THE PURE WORD OF GOD AND RECEIVE THE SACRAMENTS IN A MANNER THAT IS
RIGHTLY ADMINISTERED.
THAT IS SO IMPORTANT TO KEEP US GROUNDED.
NOW, LOVE -- JOHN IS A BIG, BIG TALKER OF LOVE.
"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS CHRIST, THAT
WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE."
SO THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ANOTHER BELIEVER, BUT HOW DO WE GET THERE?
IT'S THROUGH LOVE.
WE HEARD THE THINGS THAT YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO DO.
HE LOOKED FOR JUSTICE BUT SAW BLOODSHED, FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS BUT HEARD CRIES OF
DISTRESS.
AND WE GET THAT WAY FROM THE WORD OF GOD.

HERE IS WHAT THE WRITER OF HEBREWS SAID IN 4:12: "FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS ALIVE AND ACTIVE, SHARPER THAN ANY DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD.

IT PENETRATES TO EVEN DIVIDING SOUL AND SPIRIT, JOINTS AND MARROW.

IT JUDGES THE THOUGHTS AND THE ATTITUDES OF THE HEART."

THE WORD OF GOD IS GOD'S PRUNING SHEARS.

THE WORD OF GOD IS WHAT TRIMS OFF THOSE THINGS THAT GROW IN US THAT ARE NOT GOOD FOR US.

NOW, WE HEAR THIS TALK ABOUT PRUNING, CUTTING OFF BRANCHES AND THROWING THEM INTO THE FIRE, AND WE START LOOKING AROUND AND GO, ALL RIGHT, WHO IS NOT BEARING FRUIT?

WHO CAN I CUT OFF AND THROW INTO THE FIRE?

THAT'S NOT WHAT IT IS SAYING HERE, FOLKS.

IT IS NOT WHAT IT IS SAYING AT ALL.

WHO IS THE GARDENER?

IS IT YOU?

IT IS THE FATHER?

THE FATHER IS THE GARDENER.

WE ARE NOT CALLED TO BE THE ONE THAT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DOING THAT.

WE'RE CALLED TO LOVE PEOPLE ANYWAY.

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT IN A BIG GROUP BECAUSE YOU HAVE THOSE PEOPLE THAT NOT ONLY DO THEY NOT PRODUCE FRUIT, BUT THEY STIR UP DISSENTION.

IT HAPPENS IN EVERY SINGLE GROUP OF PEOPLE, WHETHER IT IS A CHURCH OR WHETHER IT IS A JOB OR WHETHER IT IS A SCHOOL -- NO MATTER WHAT IT IS, WHEREVER PEOPLE GO THERE ARE SINNERS.

AND THE SINNERS ARE ALWAYS GOING TO WANT THEIR WAY.

AND SOMETIMES THEY'LL USE WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY TO STIR UP DISSENTION IN THE DIRECTION THEY DON'T THINK THINGS SHOULD GO.

I REMEMBER A GUY CAME TO ME ONE TIME -- A PASTOR CAME TO ME AND HE SAID, YOU KNOW, DAVE, I'VE GOT THIS PROBLEM IN MY CHURCH.

WE'VE GOT A REALLY BEAUTIFUL CHURCH, BUT THERE IS THIS LITTLE, SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT ARE STIRRING UP DISSENTION, THAT ARE MAKING IT SO DOGGONE HARD THEY'RE FIGHTING ME TOOTH AND NAIL AND FIGHTING THE CONGREGATION ON EVERYTHING THAT WE DO.

AND I SAID, YOU OUGHT TO TALK TO YOUR SUPERVISOR ABOUT IT.

AND SO HE WENT AND TALKED TO HIS BISHOP.

HE CAME BACK AND SAID, I TALKED TO THE BISHOP.

I GO, WHAT DID HE SAY?

HE SAID, HE PUT HIS HAND ON MY SHOULDER AND SAID YOU'RE JUST A FEW FUNERALS SHORT OF A GREAT CHURCH.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Pastor Dave: SOME PEOPLE YOU JUST CAN'T CHANGE.

BUT THEY'RE NOT GOING TO LAST.

BUT WHILE THEY'RE HERE, OUR JOB IS TO LOVE THEM.

OUR JOB IS TO LOVE THEM.

THERE IS A PARABLE THAT JESUS TOLD, BECAUSE HE WAS STARTING TO GET A LOT OF PEOPLE PULLING AGAINST HIM, HE WASN'T RECEIVED WELL.
AND THE DISCIPLES ARE WONDERING WHY.
HOW COME THERE ARE NOT MORE PEOPLE BELIEVING IN YOUR WORD?
SO HE TOLD THE PARABLE ABOUT A GUY THAT HAD A FIELD.
HE HIRED HIS WORKERS TO PLANT THIS GOOD SEED THAT HE BOUGHT.
THEY HARVESTED IT, THEY PLANTED THE SEED, BUT THEN AT NIGHT AN ENEMY CAME AND PLANTED BAD SEED, PLANTED WEEDS.
SO WHEN THE CROP CAME UP, IT CAME UP WITH WHEAT AND WEEDS.
SO THE HARVESTER SAID, DID YOU BUY CHEAP SEED?
DID YOU BUY IT AT KMART?
NO, I BOUGHT GOOD SEED.
WELL, WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?
WELL, AN ENEMY SOWED IT AMONG US.
AND HE GOES, DO YOU WANT US TO GO PULL IT UP?
AND HE GOES NO.
LET IT GROW BECAUSE IF YOU PULL IT UP NOW, YOU MIGHT GET SOME OF THE WHEAT ALONG WITH THE WEEDS.
LET IT GROW.
WHEN IT IS TIME FOR THE HARVEST, THE HARVESTERS WILL COME.
WHO ARE THE HARVESTERS?
NOT YOU AND I.
THEY ARE GOD'S ANGELS.
GOD'S ANGELS ARE THE ONES.
PAUL TELLS US IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS 6, THAT OUR BATTLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD.
IT IS NOT AGAINST PEOPLE.
IT IS AGAINST SPIRITS AND PRINCIPALITIES IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS, THE INFLUENCES THAT CAUSE PEOPLE TO DO THINGS THAT ARE CONTRARY TO GOD'S WILL.
THAT IS WHAT OUR BATTLE IS AGAINST.
EACH AND EVERY SINGLE PERSON IS CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD, AND PRECIOUS BEYOND BELIEF TO GOD.
WE CAN'T BE DESTROYING THOSE PEOPLE.
WE'VE GOT TO BE CAREFUL SOMETIMES, BUT WE CAN'T DESTROY THEM.
WE'VE GOT TO LOVE THEM INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.
IT GOES ON TO TALK ABOUT -- WELL, LET US GET A LITTLE PERSONAL HERE.
LET'S TALK ABOUT PRUNING, CUTTING AWAY SOME THINGS.
HAVE YOU EVER HAD A PLANT AND YOU NOTICED EVERY SO OFTEN THERE WILL BE THIS CHUTE THAT COMES UP THAT DOESN'T REALLY GROW A FLOWER?
IT IS JUST THERE.
THEY CALL THAT A SUCKER CHUTE, RIGHT?
ALL IT DOES IS TAKES NUTRIENTS FROM THE PLANT.
IT IS NEVER GOING TO PRODUCE A FLOWER.
IT IS NEVER GOING TO PRODUCE ANYTHING THAT IS GOOD FOR THE PLANT.

IT JUST SUCKS UP THE FOOD THAT THE REST OF THE PLANT NEEDS TO DO WHAT IT IS SUPPOSED TO DO.

SO WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THAT?

YOU CUT IT OFF?

YOU THROW IT INTO THE FIRE?

THAT'S OKAY.

WE CAN DO THAT TO OURSELVES.

WE CAN LOOK AT THE THINGS IN OUR LIVES THAT CAUSE US TO LEAD ASTRAY, AND THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY WORD, THE POWER THAT IS ABLE TO DIVIDE, RIGHT THE TRUTH, BONE AND MARROW, WE CAN CUT AWAY THOSE THINGS IN OUR OWN LIVES.

PETER KNEW ABOUT THAT.

PETER KNEW ABOUT HOW IT FELT TO HAVE SOME TRIMMING BACK OF SOME SUCKER CHUTES.

REMEMBER WHEN JESUS ASKED HIS DISCIPLES, WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM?

SOME PEOPLE SAY THIS AND SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

PETER SAID, "YOU'RE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD."

AND JESUS WAS SO HAPPY THAT HE SAID THAT.

HE SAID, "BLESSED ARE YOU, SIMON, SON OF JONAH; THIS WAS NOT REVEALED TO YOU BY MAN BUT BY MY FATHER IN HEAVEN.

AND I'M GOING TO BUILD MY CHURCH ON YOUR CONFESSION."

PRETTY SOON JESUS STARTED TALKING TO HIM ABOUT WHAT IT MEANT TO BE THE MESSIAH.

REMEMBER WHAT PETER SAID THEN?

"THIS SHALL NEVER BE."

JESUS' RESPONSE: "GET BEHIND ME, SATAN."

THERE WAS A LITTLE PRUNING THERE, RIGHT?

THEN ON THE LAST SUPPER, JESUS GATHERED HIS DISCIPLES TOGETHER AND HE WARNED PETER THAT YOU ARE GOING TO BETRAY ME.

THIS IS WHAT HE SAID IN THE BOOK OF LUKE 22: "SIMON, SIMON, SATAN HAS ASKED TO SIFT ALL OF YOU AS WEED.

BUT I HAVE PRAYED FOR YOU, SIMON, THAT YOUR FAITH MAY NOT FAIL.

AND WHEN YOU HAVE TURNED BACK, STRENGTHEN YOUR BROTHERS."

BUT HE REPLIED: "LORD, I AM READY TO GO WITH YOU TO PRISON AND TO DEATH."

JESUS ANSWERED: "I TELL YOU, PETER, BEFORE THE ROOSTER CROWS TODAY, YOU WILL DENY ME THREE TIMES."

BUT HE WAS RESTORED, RIGHT?

THAT'S NOT -- HE DID DENY JESUS THREE TIMES, BUT JESUS DIDN'T LEAVE IT THAT WAY.

AT THE END OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, WE SEE THEM OUT FISHING, AND THEY'RE COOKING FISH AND THEY'RE HAVING SOME BREAD, THE FIRST FISH TACO STAND OF ALL CREATION.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Pastor Dave: THEY'RE HAVING FISH AND BREAD, AND JESUS ASKS PETER, "DO YOU LOVE ME?"

"YES, LORD, I LOVE YOU."

"FEED MY SHEEP."

HE DOES IT THREE TIMES AND HE RESTORES HIM.

PAUL KNOWS A LITTLE BIT ABOUT BEING PRUNED.
PAUL WAS GIVEN A THORN IN THE FLESH, A MESSENGER FROM SATAN -- ANYBODY IDENTIFY?
YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
A THORN IN YOUR FLESH, A MESSENGER FROM SATAN?
THAT IS TROUBLING YOU ALL OF THE TIME, THAT IS CAUSING YOU NO END OF DISCOMFORT.
SO THREE TIMES PAUL CRIED OUT TO GOD -- FOR ME IT IS LIKE THREE TIMES A MINUTE I'M
CRYING OUT TO GOD.
THREE TIMES HE CRIED OUT TO THE LORD, TAKE THIS AWAY.
AND EACH TIME GOD SAID NO. NO.
"MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR MY POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN YOUR WEAKNESS."
SO THAT'S WHAT WE NEED TO ASK GOD TO CUT AWAY.
WHAT IS IT?
IN FACT, THAT'S HOW I'M GOING TO CLOSE MY MESSAGE TO YOU TODAY.
I WANT YOU TO TAKE AN INVENTORY OF YOURSELF.
I WANT YOU TO LOOK BACK OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS.
AND REMEMBER WHAT KIND OF THINGS DID GOD HAVE YOU PRUNE AWAY FROM YOUR LIFE?
WHAT KIND OF THINGS HAVE YOU GIVEN UP?
WHAT KINDS OF THINGS HAVE YOU ADDED TO?
WHAT KINDS OF THINGS HAVE YOU DONE THAT YOU MAY BE ABIDING IN CHRIST MORE, THAT
YOU MIGHT BE REMAINING IN THE VINE EVEN MORE AND PRODUCING GOOD FRUIT THAT IS
GOING TO BE PLEASING TO GOD?
AND THE NEXT QUESTION IS: WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW?
PERSONAL ENOUGH FOR YOU?
YOU DON'T NEED TO SAY THIS OUT LOUD.
WHAT IS GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW THAT YOU NEED TO HAVE THE HEAVENLY,
LOVING, KIND SHEARS CUT AWAY FROM YOUR LIFE, TO MAKE YOUR WALK WITH JESUS BE
MORE FRUIT BEARING?
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT IS IT IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW?
YOU PROBABLY KNOW WHAT IT IS, IT'S BEEN WITH YOU SO LONG MAYBE YOU'RE AFRAID TO
ASK BECAUSE YOU'RE THINKING IT IS NOT POSSIBLE.
WELL, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD.
GOD CAN CHANGE WHATEVER IT IS THAT YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH; GOD CAN TAKE IT AWAY.
WHATEVER IT IS THAT YOU'RE FEELING HOPELESS ABOUT, GOD CAN RESTORE THAT HOPE.
AND THEN AS A CONGREGATION, I'M ASKING YOU TO THINK NOT ONLY AS YOURSELVES, BUT
AS A GROUP, THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT GATHER HERE TODAY, WHAT IS IT THAT WE NEED
TO DO?
WHAT IS IT THAT WE NEED TO HAVE GOD REMOVE FROM US?
IS THERE ANY BITTERNESS?
IS THERE ANY UNFORGIVING?
IS THERE SOMETHING THAT WE'RE HOLDING ONTO THAT IS CAUSING US TO BEAR THE GOOD
FRUIT THAT CHRIST WOULD ASK US TO BEAR?
BECAUSE THE BOTTOM LINE IS LOVE.
LOVE COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

STAY ROOTED IN THE VINE, WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST, AND WE SHALL BEAR FRUIT.

AND MAY THE PEACE OF GOD THAT SURPASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING GUARD YOUR
HEARTS AND MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

AMEN.