

## ARE YOU RUNNING ON EMPTY?

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John 15:1-8 NIV

<sup>1</sup> The Vine and the Branches

<sup>1</sup> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit Eph 5:9; he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> [The Greek for prunes also means cleans](#). so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Many years ago at the Tournament of Roses parade, the Standard Oil Company, now known as Chevron, had a beautiful float. In the middle of the parade the oil company's float came to a grinding halt and the rest of the parade with it. The problem? The float ran out of gas. The directors of the Chevron float had done everything well but they neglected to use their companies vast resources of oil. The parade waited while someone ran to get a gallon of gas.

The Chevron people had done the same thing that so many of us do: They had not filled their tanks.

As Jesus reminds the disciples to live in His power, uses the metaphor of the vine, which was so well known to all the Jewish people. William Barclay, the great Scottish New Testament scholar, reminds us that the image of the vine was so often used by the prophets in describing Israel "...that the vine had actually become the symbol of the nation of Israel. The emblem on the coins of the Maccabees was the vine. One of the glories of the Temple was the great golden vine upon the front of the Holy Place." Barclay also points out that always when the symbol of the vine was used by the prophets it was the symbol of 'degeneration.' He has Jesus saying in effect, "The nation is a degenerate vine, as all your prophets saw. It is I who am the true vine." Barclay also writes: "No external qualification can set a man right with God; only the friendship of Jesus can do that."

As we look at this image that Jesus uses to reminds us to live in His Presence with His power, I am going to change the metaphor a little. All of us live by using a great deal of energy driving from here to there and back. I want us to think of this illustration of Jesus, and, if we can, think about our use of energy, for driving and for living. That is why I have asked the question with my sermon title: Are You Running On Empty?

There are three kinds of people who are running on empty—First, those who do not know what is their source of power; Second, those who refuse to adequately refuel; and Third, Those who are too far from the power source.

I. THE FIRST PEOPLE WHO ARE RUNNING ON EMPTY ARE THOSE WHO ARE UNACQUAINTED WITH THE SOURCE OF POWER. Clearly Jesus is saying I am that source. Look at His words: Jn. 15:1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” With these words Jesus declares that He is utterly unique: He is God the Son.

A. The World of Jesus Day was more open to religions of every sort; but we are living in a day when most people want to challenge faith in any god at all. C.E.M. JOAD, the great English philosopher wrote, “For the first time in human history there is coming to maturity a generation of men and women who have no religion and feel no need for one.” That has happened. And I think it has happened partly as a pragmatic way of getting rid of guilt. If there is no god, whatever I do is o.k. If there is no god, there is no judgment. If there is no god, I am not accountable, except to society, and they are just a bunch of silly people with silly ideas and values that I don’t have to accept anyway, and besides that, they are no better than me. For such doubting people, the question is, What if there is a God, and what if He holds us all accountable for our sins, and what can wash away our sins? And what about the evil in the world that Paul used to include us all: Rom. 1:28-31 “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient:” “Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,” “Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,” “Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:” “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.” Certainly there is a God, and certainly we all find ourselves in that list, and certainly we are accountable to God who will come in judgment of the entire earth.

B. Jesus is the Source of Power with Whom we should be acquainted. He said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the Husbandman.” In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me.” Jesus is Truth, and He alone possesses the power to fill the lives of men to keep them from running on empty. He is the “I am” who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush. He is the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last; and He also is the Source of Real Power. He says, “I am the true vine.” Seneca, the Stoic philosopher confessed: “I have been trying to climb out of the pit of my besetting sins—in vain. And I never can, and never will, unless a hand is let down to me to draw me up.” The only One who can save us and give us Life, and help us to overcome the terrible addictions that human flesh is subject to is that ‘hand let down’ that Seneca spoke about. Paul lists a lot of our addictions, sexual and otherwise, that only Jesus can make right.

Since Jesus is the source of that power, those who are unacquainted with Jesus do not know that power including members of our own households who have not yet met Jesus in the forgiveness of their sins. Like a broke teenager, or a Chevron float, they are running on empty

#The story is told of a native from a remote village who had the opportunity to visit a large modern city for the first time. He could not bring much home with him, and he had little money. But he was amazed at the electric lights which he saw everywhere. So he bought a sack full of electric lights bulbs and sockets with switches so he could turn them off and on.

Arriving home he hung the light bulbs in front of his home and on his and his neighbor's trees. Everyone watched him with curiosity and asked him what he was doing, but he just smiled and said, "Just wait until dark--you'll see."

When night came he turned on the switches, but nothing happened. No one had told him about electricity. He did not know the light bulbs were useless unless connected to the source of their power.

## II. THE SECOND GROUP RUNNING ON EMPTY ARE THOSE WHO HAVE MET JESUS, WHO KNOW THE SOURCE, AND WHO REFUSE TO REFUEL THEIR LIVES.

A. One thinks first of the Jews who refused to believe in Jesus and to refuel their lives by accepting Him as their Messiah. Barclay writes: "Who was Jesus thinking of when He spoke of the fruitless branches? There are two answers to that. First, He was thinking of the Jews. They were branches of God's vine. Was not that the picture that prophet after prophet had drawn of them? But they refused to listen to Him; they refused to accept Him; and therefore they were withered and useless branches."

One cannot but help and think of that 'acted' parable in which Jesus cursed the fig tree as useless, and it withered and died. Our lives are no different. The Jewish people—I love them deeply—had a history as the 'covenant' people. God made a contract with them. They were to abide in the Vine; but alas, like most people, they failed to do so. The Book of Judges tells of God's dealings with them. They would become corrupted by the world around them; then things would become so bad that they would cry out to God for deliverance; God would send them a deliverer, and for a while things would go well. But the pattern would emerge again and again. However, God never fully deserted them then, nor has He today. As Paul writes in Romans, they are still His chosen people; and one day they will be redeemed.

B. You thought I'd forgotten the rest of Barclay's comment: "Second, He (Jesus) was thinking of something more general than that. He was thinking of Christians whose Christianity consisted of profession without practice, who were useless branches, all leaves and no fruit." Thank God, that kind of person is near enough to the fuel supply to get enough fuel to run their lives if they so choose. Someone used a different word for them than 'God's chosen people', calling them, 'God's Frozen people.'

How many deacons spent 30 minutes a day in prayer? How many Sunday School teachers spent 60 minutes a day in prayer to the Heavenly Father. If I understand what 'abiding' in Jesus means, it means staying as close to Him as I can every single minute of

every single day. Why is it that so many in our community are unsaved? Why is it that so many never darken the doors of our churches? I think it is because of our pitiful prayer lives. We have not because we ask not. Charles Finney, one of the great American evangelists, said that in a certain town there had been no revival for several years, causing the church to be almost vacated, and the youth were unprincipled, as was the entire town. One man, a blacksmith by trade, who could not speak without stammering, became so convicted by this state of things that he left his work at noon one day, locked the door of his business, and prayed all afternoon. That Sunday he asked the pastor of his church to hold a revival meeting. The pastor told him he thought nobody would come. Reluctantly he agreed to hold the meeting. He was shocked to see so many people present. People began to beg anyone who knew Jesus to pray for them. People started getting saved, Christians became revived, and a powerful revival filled that town. When they related when they came under conviction for their sinful state, they all agreed it was on that afternoon that a stammering man prevailed as a prince with God. When you abide in Christ you can ask what you will and it shall be done unto you. Christians don't need to run on an empty tank. Preachers don't need to run on empty tanks. The great Scottish preacher, Thomas Chalmers confessed that much of his ministry he was 'trusting more to his own animal heat and activity than to the Holy Spirit.' We must lay aside our human power to receive the Power that Jesus promised. Then we can sing, "There is power, power, wonder working power in the precious blood of the lamb."

### III. THE THIRD GROUP RUNNING ON EMPTY ARE THOSE SO FAR FROM THE POWER SOURCE THAT THEY DESPAIR OF EVEN GETTING BACK TO PURCHASE THE NEEDED FUEL.

A. THE SAVED WHO HAVE BACKSLIDDEN, AND THINK THEY CAN'T COME BACK. There are many out in the ways of sin today who have done what 2 Peter 2:22 says, "But it is happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Such people will tell you, "I was a Christian once, but now I am so far away that I don't feel I can come back." They have lost hope, I trust, only in themselves and not in God. If that is the case then they can come back easier. As long as there is life, there is hope that things can get better. But not in your own strength can they get better. Jesus said, "Without me, you can do nothing." Probably the thing that caused them to fall was that they tried to stand in their own strength, when the Bible says we must stand in the strength of the Lord God.

B. ONCE THE BACKSLIDDEN MAN REALIZES HOW HELPLESS HE IS, like the prodigal son, he may return to his Heavenly Father. Martin Luther prayed that God would not be silent toward him, and would rather punish him rather than be silent toward him. Suffering is one tool that God often uses to bring men and women back to himself. Montaigne said that he doubted that suffering brought men closer to God, for it only made him curse. The Bible teaches that our misery can lead us away from self and back to the Saviour. We are closer than we think to the Source of Power whenever we despair of self, provided we reach out in faith to God, and continue to Abide in His presence.

The great point is, however, that the only way we can live our lives successfully is to Know the Source personally, to abide in Him daily, and to return to Him when our tanks are empty. We need to stop running on empty! We need to Abide in His presence daily, to rest in the Secret Place of the Almighty! And when we run away from God, like a wild teenager hiding from his father, we need to return humbled like the Prodigal Sons that we are. We don't have to run on empty tanks. God will fill our lives with Joy as we abide in Him. John 15:11 "These things have I spoken to you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."