

## Who Do You Say That I AM?

**John 15:1-17**

**"I AM The True Vine"**

### **Introduction**

If you were given just three short years to teach a group of disciples, and you had only one opportunity left to teach them before you went away, don't you think that you would save the most important lesson for last? Of course you would. You would naturally want to give them something that they could hang onto that would sustain them after you were gone. The night before He went to the cross, Jesus had a Passover meal with his disciples. After they left the upper room (**John 14:31**), they all made their way to Gethsemane, located at the foot of the Mount of Olives. The route that they took would lead them by The Temple in Jerusalem. The gates of the temple had been custom made of bronze with a golden grapevine woven into them. The grapevine was an Old Testament reference to the nation of Israel (**Psalms 80:8-9; Isaiah 5:1; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1**). God had "planted" Israel among the nations as a beacon of His truth for all the world to see. Sadly, Israel had not lived up to its potential, and rather than producing "good fruit" and being a shining example, the nation had been a source of disappointment to God. After all, God had gone to great lengths to "tend" this special vine that He had planted, and yet Israel had produced "sour grapes" (**Jeremiah 2:21**).

It was most likely that Jesus used the imagery of the temple gates to begin His final and most important lesson to His disciples. **"I AM the true vine", He said. "The only way to bear good and lasting fruit is to remain in Me."** You see, these guys had spent their entire lives believing that the way to right standing with God was to be good law abiding Jews. Jesus wanted them to understand that in order to find true fellowship with God, one need not be connected to Israel, but rather to Him. He IS the true vine. Being a Jew wouldn't save them, but HE WOULD. Being a Jew couldn't help them to obey the commandments, but HE COULD. The only way to have real power for living the Godly life was by remaining connected The True Vine. This is the seventh and final I AM statement of Christ. Israel may have been a vine planted by Him, but He is the Original. He is the true vine. He IS God. He wants His followers to remain connected to Him. Just as the root of a tree feeds all of its branches, He will "nourish" His "branches", so they will have everything they need to produce good fruit. In our own strength, it is impossible for us to please God, but in Him, we are guaranteed to do so. It is not about who we are, but about who we will become, if we remain in HIM. We will Become ONE WITH THE FRUIT. We will Become ONE WITH THE VINE, and we will Become ONE WITH THE BRANCHES.

### **Becoming One With The Fruit**

Jesus tells his disciples that if they abide (or remain, depending upon the translation) in Him, then they will bear fruit (**vs. 1-5**). The word translated "abide" (meno in the Greek) means to stay in a constant state of connection. In other words, just like the branches of a grapevine, we are to stay connected to Jesus, who is the source of our sustaining nourishment. To be cut off from Him is to dry up and wither. The branches are completely dependent upon the root for their very existence. Jesus says that He is the vine. We are the branches. He sustains us, and God is the one who sustains Him, The True Vine. God The Father has made certain that Christ was completely taken care of and provided for. Just as Jesus remains in God, we are to remain in Him. This is the only way that we can live a life that produces the kind of spiritual "fruit" that God requires. Israel had been given The Law, but they could not live up to it. However, we have been given Christ, who will enable us to live according to God's will so long as we remain connected to Him. Apart from this constant connection, we are destined to fail just as surely as Israel did. Without the "sap" from the roots, branches die. Simple as that.

Therefore, Jesus takes upon Himself the complete responsibility of the "fruit-bearing" in our lives. We are not called upon to make the fruit. We are simply the conduit from which the fruit is produced from the vine. All that we are required to do is stay connected, and well... fruit just happens! But what exactly IS fruit in this context anyway? Simply put, fruit is Godliness. Just as a grapevine is naturally expected to

produce grapes and an apple tree is expected to produce apples, a Christian is expected to produce "Christ-likeness". If you determine that you are going to "go out there and be like Jesus", trust me, you will fail miserably. BUT, if you are determined to let Jesus live through you, then you, my friend, will become a successful fruit-bearer. Simple as that. You can't do this, but HE can. **"Apart from ME you can do nothing (vs. 5)."**

If you stay in constant connection/communion with Christ, then the personality of Christ will come out through you. This is what the Apostle Paul called "The Fruit of the Spirit" (**Galatians 22**). Many people completely misunderstand exactly what "The Fruit of The Spirit" truly is. They mistakenly believe that these are individual traits that some Christians will possess, but Paul doesn't say "the Fruit(s) of The Spirit are"..., but He says, **"The Fruit of the Spirit IS Love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control"**. These are not items to be obtained individually like one picks different foods at a buffet table. They are rather, the very personality traits of Christ. A Christian cannot say, "Well, I have faith, but not patience" or "I have gentleness, but not kindness". It simply doesn't work that way. You don't get to pick and choose which "fruits" you want. They come as a package! If you truly have the Spirit of Christ living in you, if you are connected to The True Vine, then ALL of His personality traits will become a by-product of your very existence. Or, as Jesus would say, **"You WILL bear fruit" (vs.5)**. And, not just a little fruit, but MUCH fruit, according to Jesus! The longer you stay connected to Him, the more fruit you will bear.

How then, does Jesus, who has taken complete responsibility for the fruit bearing in your life, cause you to bear more and more fruit as you continue to remain connected in Him? It is done by something that He calls "pruning" (**vs. 2**). Pruning, in the world of horticulture, is when a vine-dresser (gardener) takes an individual branch and removes any dead offshoots or things that would hinder it's growth. No gardener worth his salt will allow nourishment from the root system to be wasted on a dead part of a limb that will never produce. Pruning, therefore, allows all of the life giving nourishment to be given to healthy branches; branches that are free from deadness, dirt, and disease. Also, another way of pruning or purging is when the gardener sees the lower limbs of the grapevine fall into the mud where he knows that those branches will not get enough sunshine and will produce no grapes, the gardener lifts those filthy branches up from the mire and props them up after he cleans them. He will often prop them up on a rock to keep them from falling back into the filth from whence they came. This will ensure that these once doomed, fallen branches will now produce fruit. Talk about a spiritual picture of what Christ has done for us!

Jesus told His disciples that they had already been "cleaned" (**vs.3**) by **"The Word which I have spoken to you"**. What exactly was He saying? He was explaining to us the "pruning process" by which He makes us more fruitful. The WORD of GOD! When we read His Word, it convicts us of the sins (dirt, grime and deadness) that are hindering our spiritual growth. As we confess these sins, and ask for God's help to remove them from our lives, we become more and more like Christ. He cuts away the deadness, and pulls us up from the mud. We become more and more yielded to his complete control. The more yielded, the more His personality shines through. In other words, we bear more Jesus fruit!

Another way that we "bear fruit" is by staying closely connected to Christ through prayer and the study of His Word. Then, we will become effective branches of the vine for ministry. The very purpose of fruit is to FEED people. The Church has been charged with making disciples. We are to become what Israel had struggled to be, a light for all nations (**Matthew 5 :14**). Earlier in this series, we discovered that Jesus claimed to be The Light of The World (**John 8:12**). So, how is it that WE are to be the light of the world when it is HE that is the light of the world? Simple. If we are connected to Him, the He shines through US! You can go stand on the street corner and preach the gospel till the cows come home, but if you don't have the light of Jesus shining from within you, you'll never reach a single soul. Why? Because apart from His power we can do nothing (**vs. 5**). Do you want to be effective in bearing fruit and feeding lost souls for Christ? Then you MUST stay connected to The Vine! You will never walk through an orchard late at night and hear the branches straining to push out fruit. All that a branch has to do is to stay connected to the root (or the vine), and well... Fruit Happens!

### **Becoming One With The Vine**

I believe that many Christians are completely at a loss to understand why Jesus died for them. It seems to me that many believe that the whole thing is about where you will spend eternity, in heaven or hell. Truth is, the issue is a whole lot more complex than that. Jesus died to restore us to complete fellowship with God. Sin in the Garden of Eden separated man from God. Jesus died to restore that fellowship. In other words, God created us for constant companionship. He didn't lay down His life so that we could have an insurance policy to prevent us from going to hell. He was willing to die, so that we could become His close friends! Think about your relationship with God for a moment. Would you describe it as a close friendship, or a faith in someone who is far away and distant? Jesus died to be your best friend! Just listen to what He told His disciples that night on the way to Gethsemane. **"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his FRIENDS (vs. 13)."** Did you catch that? Jesus was telling them that He was going to die for them, because he loved them as His friends! He didn't say anything about heaven or hell in that sentence. He was talking about friendship. He was willing to die, so that you and He could be the best of friends. Is this the kind of relationship that you are pursuing with Him? Is Jesus your closest friend? Or just someone you believe in, hoping to never see the gates of hell?

You know why there are many "so called" Christians out there whose lives are a total disaster? Because they aren't friends of God, that's why. Jesus told His disciple to stay connected to (abide with) Him, and He would communicate freely with them what he was doing (**vs. 14-15**). He promised them that being connected to Him as a closest friend would ensure that they're prayers would be answered (**vs. 7**). Do you know why people don't get what they ask for in prayer? Because they do not remain close enough to Christ to know WHAT to ask for. He is not about giving us our selfish desires. He IS about giving us our SELFLESS desires! A connected-to-the-vine Christian is no longer preoccupied with the stuff that he, or she wants. They no longer care about their own personal aspirations and dreams. No, the Spirit-filled, connected-to-The-Vine Christian only cares about one thing: The Will of Christ! When you are connected to the vine, when you are a true friend of God, then God will let you in on His will (**vs. 15**). When you pray for what God wants, the answer will always be yes. This is what it means to be a friend of God. I hear people say all the time that they have never been able to "hear" God's voice. People who call themselves CHRISTIANS, mind you! If you are connected to the True Vine, if you pray and seek his face and study His Word, then, you WILL hear His voice. Guaranteed. Friends communicate with one another. That is how a friendship is maintained. Jesus died so that you could become His friend. Trust me, He is longing to hear from you, and He is longing for you to hear from Him. He is all about us becoming one with Him. Stay connected to The Vine.

### **Becoming One With The Branches**

Jesus went on to tell his disciples that just as He had loved them, they in turn must love one another (**vs. 17**). Imagine that. We are to be one with the fruit, one with the vine, and one with the branches as well. Makes sense when you think about it that way doesn't it? I mean, if we, the branches, are all connected to the same vine, we are in him, and He is in us. Then it stands to reason, that we would love one another, just as He loves us. Come to think of it, I've never walked through a vineyard and seen branches of a grapevine slapping each other around! I guess being connected to the same vine makes them want to live in harmony with one another. What an amazing concept! Does this mean, that if everyone in the church would stay constantly connected to the vine, then we would all be able to get along? Why yes, actually, that is EXACTLY what that means. The closer we stay to Jesus, the better we will get along with each other. Wouldn't you just love to go to a church like that? A place where everybody was on the same page and moved together as one body and not just a bunch of individuals trying to push for their own agendas. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Well, thats exactly what Jesus died so that we could have. ONENESS with ALL of the branches.

If I were to ask you this morning who do you think are the most dangerous people in the church, how would you respond? You might be tempted to say, "The ones with the most sin in their lives, or those who refuse serve in the church". But honestly, if you said that, you'd be incorrect. I am convinced that the most dangerous people in the church are often some of the busiest "workers" in the church, who

aren't out in the world living in wickedness. So who are these folks that are the most dangerous to a church? It's people who get so caught up in either doing "church work" or "doing life" (work, sports, or hobbies) that they neglect their quiet time of prayer and Bible study, that's who. Oh, they may do a lot of "stuff" in the church, but they aren't staying connected to The Vine. The result is that they try to do spiritual things in their own flesh. Any time we bring the flesh into this place my friends, we are headed for disaster. Apart from Him we can do NOTHING! I've seen some of the biggest "church fights" you can imagine over "Christians" not willing to share a Sunday school room with other church members and other stuff like that! Are you telling me that these people are spending enough time at the feet of Jesus? Certainly not! Being connected to The Vine will CAUSE us to love one another. Having problems getting along with other church members? So, how's your prayer life? How much time are you spending in the Word? Apart from Him, you can do nothing. Maybe its time to reconnect.

Here is a word of warning: Jesus said that any branch "in Him" that does not bear fruit, He will take it away (vs. 2). Think about that for a moment this morning. This doesn't mean that you can lose your salvation. People who are not saved are the branches the He speaks of in verse 6. We all know what happens to those who reject Christ. But, what about believers who year after year refuse to do what is required of them and stay in close connection with The Vine? If you truly belong to Jesus, and you have no interest in staying connected to Him and bearing fruit, then simply put, he can cut your life short. The Apostle John calls this "the sin that leads to death" (1 John 5:16). Now I'm not trying to be overly dramatic, nor am I attempting to scare anybody here, but it is unwise for any believer not to take his/her fruit bearing responsibilities seriously. In short, don't try and play games with the grace of God. He expects us to be His representatives here on this earth. He will not allow us to go around calling ourselves Christians, all the while living in a way that is embarrassing to the kingdom. We are REQUIRED to bear fruit. There is a reason that they are called "commands" and not "suggestions". Are you staying connected to The Vine this morning? ARE you becoming ONE with The Fruit, ONE with The Vine, and One with The Branches? Are you being constantly "pruned" by the Word of God to become more and more like Christ? He died for you, so that you can bear fruit for him and bring glory to God with your life. NO more pretending. No more going through the motions. I want to be connected to Christ. I want him to be my reason for living. I want to LIVE, so that others can see Him in me! Who is with me? Let's all stay connected.

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!