

The Word Became Flesh
Week 44
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 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 have 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 becoming 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**).

Jesus most likely 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. For He is the *true* vine. Being a Jew wouldn't save them, but *He* would. Their Jewish heritage couldn't enable them to obey the commandments, but *He* could. The only means by which we are empowered to live a righteous life is by remaining connected The True Vine, thus the seventh, and final, I AM statement of Christ.

Israel may have been a vine planted by God, but Jesus is the origin, the *true* vine. He is the Word that was *with* God and *was* God (**John 1:1**). Christ's will is for His followers to remain connected to Him. Just as the root of a tree feeds all of its branches, He promises to “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 connected to Christ the True Vine. We must *Remain in Him, Remain in His Love, and Remain in Each Other*.

Remain in Him (vs 1- 6)

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in Him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

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, as The Father sustains Him, The True Vine. God The Father made certain that Christ had every provision that He needed in order to fulfill His mission. He had all that he needed *from* the Father, because He was *in* The Father. And 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 baptized into Christ, Who enables 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 full 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 emanate from you. This is what the Apostle Paul called "The Fruit of the Spirit" (**Galatians 5:22**). 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, Long-suffering, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control"**. These are not attributes to be obtained individually like one picks different items from 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 do not 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 an ever increasing amount of fruit, according to Jesus! Notice the progression of His words: "fruit, more fruit, much fruit". 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 in 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!

Of course, to reject God's offer of salvation by refusal to connect with The Vine is to remain lost in sin. And God's wrath shall remain upon those who do so (**vs. 6**). There is no hope for the unrepentant sinner, who desires no union with Christ. Such "branches" are destined for eternal destruction. It is nearly impossible not to think of Judas, the betrayer, as we read this verse. He must have been on The LORD'S mind, when he spoke these words. Here was a man who had pretended to attach himself to Christ, and yet, never truly made the connection. True believer's, however, will remain in Christ and will not only be secure, but also guaranteed to become fruitful. The Gardener "prunes" us into ever increasing productivity.

True believers will "bear fruit" 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. Branches do not eat their own fruit. The fruit is produced for the benefit of others. 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, then *He* shines through *us*! You can go stand on the street corner and preach the gospel until 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!

Remain in His Love (vs. 7-16)

If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples. "As the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love. If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is My command: Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: to lay down His life for His friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you.

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 His constant companionship. He didn't lay down His life just so that we could have an insurance policy to prevent us from going to hell. He was willing to die, so that we could be connected with Him! 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 in order to become 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 relationship. He was willing to die, in order to have an intimate, personal relationship... with you. 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 do not live as friends of God, that’s why. As Jesus had already shared with His followers around the supper table that night, to remain in His love is to remain in obedience to His commands. So that we will no longer live according to our own selfish desires, but rather, we forsake them in order to remain in His love! To be His friend is worth more to us than all else. Simply put, we find our joy in Him, rather than anything this world has to offer. True and lasting joy can only be found by knowing and following Christ: To be a friend of God.

Jesus told His disciples 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 their 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 even know what to ask of Him. It is not about Him giving us what **we** want. It is about having what **He** wants for us. A connected-to-the-vine Christian is no longer preoccupied with the stuff that he or she wants. They are no longer consumed with personal ambition, nor selfish desire. 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**). And 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 “*Christian*”, mind you! But 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 friendship is maintained. Jesus died so that you could pray, so that you would be able to commune with Him. Trust me. He is longing to hear from you, and He is longing for you to hear from Him. This is all about us becoming one with Him. So remain in His love, stay connected to The Vine, and obey His commands.

Remain in Each Other (vs. 17)

“This is what I command you: Love one another.

John 15:17

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 closer we will be with one another. 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, Jesus died so that we could have this unity among **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” (so called) who were unwilling to share a Sunday school room with their fellow church members (I really should write a book about the ridiculous things I've witnessed in churches). 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 believers? 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, although I do believe that He is speaking of Christians here, because He refers to them as “branches *in Him*”. Lost people are the branches that He speaks of in verse 6. We all know what happens to those who reject Christ. But, what about those believers who are willing to settle for a superficial attachment to Christ, rather than a deep abiding connection with The Vine? If you belong to Jesus, yet have no zeal for “fruit bearing”, then Christ may very well remove you from your place in the body. Unfruitful Christians are of no real value to the gospel or to the kingdom. And a persistence in living in self-indulgence is antithetical to remaining in The Vine. I believe that the “removal” of less than faithful believers from the body is precisely what the Apostle John refers to as “*the sin that leads to death*” in 1 John 5:16.

Now, I'm not trying to be overly dramatic, nor am I attempting to scare anybody here (or maybe I am), 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 detrimental or embarrassing to the kingdom. We are **required** to bear fruit. There is a reason that these things 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 though the motions. I want to be connected to Christ. I want Him to be my reason for living. I want to give in such a way, so that others can see Him in me! Who is with me? Let's all stay connected.

And let the branches say... TRUTH!!!