

I AM THE TRUE VINE

I was counseled by an older minister (in his 80's) a little over a year ago. He said we had a good thing going here. He wrote me this: "You've begun a new work. Unpack the meaning, character & final purpose of God in His self-revelation in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection & glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. For a couple of years, THRILL THEM with His glory and with the joy that that generates and as they come to love Him their commitment to Him will deepen. That's what happened to you and Jordan. 'If you love me,' He said, 'you will keep my commandments.' You know what happened when you came to love Jordan and the children, all you wanted/want to do is please them. THAT'S what Jesus had in mind in the text. He wasn't saying [to His friends], 'Well, keeping my commandments will prove whether or not you love me.'"

I pray that I've been doing this and will continue to do so. That's what I've attempted to do anyways! Sermons can sometimes talk around Jesus. I hope mine are centered on Him. In this series we've learned much about Him. We learned that Jesus is the bread of life, so we are completely satisfied with that kind of bread. He is the light of the world, so we are out of the darkness. He is the door to the sheep and the good shepherd, so we listen to His voice alone. He is the resurrection, so we too will be raised. He is the way, truth and life, so we are about His way and His way alone. Finally, He is the true vine. That means we're attached to Jesus.

Read John 15:1-11.

John 15:1-3, 6 "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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you . . . If anyone does not abide in Me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."

- Why the vine?
 - Some think they could observe the vineyard from the upper room window (perhaps burning withered branches from the vines) or a vine coming through an upper window. Some wonder if they already made their way out of the upper room and passed by the vineyards on the way to the garden. Perhaps Jesus had in mind the fruit of the vine they just drank? Reason being, every one of Jesus' "I am" statement was connected to something happening at the time He spoke the words (multiplying fish and bread, feast of booths/healing blind man, rebuking the Pharisees as leaders, etc.). Who knows. However, He had something in mind and we want to understand its significance.
- It's significance.
 - The vine was used to symbolically represent Israel. It's seen in several passages. The Maccabees of c. 150 B.C. inscribed it on their coins to represent their nation. Herod the Great, restoring the Jerusalem temple in 19 B.C., also had a large vine of gold hung around the entrance to the Holy Place.
- Examples in scripture.
 - **Psalm 80:8-9** You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.
 - **Ezekiel 19:10-11** Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the water, fruitful and full of branches by reason of abundant water. Its strong stems became rulers' scepters; it towered aloft among the thick boughs; it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches.
 - **Isaiah 5:1-7** Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning His vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; He built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and He looked for it to yield

grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting; and He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

- Taken away?

- **Ezekiel 15:1-8** And the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set My face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord God."

- **See, what Jesus is teaching isn't unique.** There's a choice - either produce and be pruned or produce nothing - be dead weight and cut off.

- John warned of being cut down at the root and burned (**Matthew 3:10** Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.) Jesus taught the same principle in **Matthew 7:17-19** about the tree that produces bad fruit.
- At this point Judas has left the vine and Jesus is about to prune the other disciples.

- Pruned

- You had to prune the vine every year while it wasn't bearing fruit. A grape vine typically doesn't produce fruit until it's third year (poetic coincidence that Jesus was just over His third year of ministry), but pruning was important to do every year.
- Pruning either had the meaning of cleansing or cutting dead branches or unnecessary growth. This fits well because it fulfills both illustrations: cutting off unnecessary wood or being cleansed by the word.
- Brethren, this message isn't centered on what not to do, but more about producing fruit. Every disciple that produces fruit must be pruned. We must be cleansed by the word to produce.
- **Ephesians 5:26** that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
- **2 Peter 1:8** For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Colossians 1:10** so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;
- **Jesus wasn't taking this time to rebuke them of sin**, but to encourage them to produce for the glory of God. **But how do we do that?**

John 15:4-5 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

- **Stay with Him.** We don't typically say to one another, "Abide/Remain with me." But we will ask those we love to stay with us - it seems like this hits home a little more.

- Brethren, we're talking about a commitment to Jesus. You can't fear commitment with Jesus. It means we're attached. It's a marriage.
- What are you attached to? You know, sometimes the thing we're attached to isn't bad, but it takes Jesus' place, and turns into something bad. It's not always about what you shouldn't do, but what you are doing - what position does it take in your life? The reality is that we all produce fruit, but only good fruit can come from Jesus. Look at Israel as they attempted to produce their own fruit:
 - **Hosea 10:1-2** Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.
- So, we're not the godly dads we need to be because we're too attached to our work or hobbies. Moms devote so much time, love and attention to their children, but somehow leave God out of the picture.
- We're attached to entertainment (really think about it), and so Jesus becomes boring.
- We're attached to ourselves - thinking we can accomplish what needs to be done, so we forget Jesus during the day in study, prayer and service to others. At some point being responsible turned into self-sufficiency.
- You cannot break off the vine and thrive!
 - **Ezekiel 19:12-14** But the vine was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground; the east wind dried up its fruit; they were stripped off and withered. As for its strong stem, fire consumed it. Now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And fire has gone out from the stem of its shoots, has consumed its fruit, so that there remains in it no strong stem, no scepter for ruling. This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation.
 - We know what the works of the flesh are vs. the fruit of the Spirit. We know what we produce. We know what only God can give.

John 15:7-11 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

- I see Jesus saying, "Stay in there with Me. Don't leave Me." It's like that plea for His disciples to stay awake in the garden - to pray for themselves. Can't they just stay awake a little while with Him? I see Him desiring a relationship with the Father through prayer, because He has confidence they will be about the Father's business and enjoy the blessings only God can give. I see Him desiring to look forward at all the good things they will do for the Father and His Kingdom - being proud of what they've done. I see the heart of it all - love. I see Jesus wanting for them true joy and peace that comes from this relationship. Jesus so loved them. Jesus loved God which was seen in His service to them all - it brought Him joy that He wanted them to have.
- Do you see it?
- What do you want? You want to be that deep Christian? One that truly feels connected to God? Has Jesus hid the secret? Do you want His joy and peace? We know the way, do we not? Joy isn't found in the world, by being detached from Him. When will receive this truth?
- It's never too late to enter the vineyard - even the one who entered at the last hour will be rewarded a home with God. Isn't that what you want?