

The True Vine (Part 2) – John 15:1

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John 15:1. This is Part 2 of a sermon I started 3 weeks ago. Connecting the dots from the Old Testament to the New regarding this loaded metaphor in the Bible of a vine and vineyard.

“*I am the true vine [John 15:1], and my Father is the vinedresser.*” (ESV) It’s one of the most loaded statements in all the Bible. Because it not only recalls the vast history of God’s work of redemption, but conveys the finality and fulfillment of it in Jesus.

Review

In Part 1, we started by recognizing that . . .

John 15:1 is the seventh and last of the great “I Am” statements

Hopefully you received a bookmark. If not, they’re still available in the lobby.

- It’s a statement of fact
- It’s a claim of divinity
- It’s a declaration of availability
- It’s an indicator of fulfillment

“*I am the true vine,*” he said. Fulfilling God’s promise and God’s work to establish his people and sustain his kingdom. Because . . .

Vines and vineyards are metaphors for the people and place of God’s kingdom

Metaphors used throughout the Bible. Like in Exodus 15, where . . .

Moses alludes to them to make a promise (Exodus 15:17)

Saying that God would *plant* his people in the land he promised. (Genesis 17:8) But . . .

Isaiah used them to withdraw the promise (Isaiah 5:1-7)

[5b] *I will remove its hedge [God said], and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.* [6a] *I will make it a waste.* Isaiah 5. Spoken . . .

- **Right before the Assyrian Dispersion in 722BC**

It happened. Just like he said. He planted them through Moses and removed them through Isaiah. He promised, and then withdrew it. Withheld it.

- **Because God was sick of their sin**

Plus . . .

Ezekiel used them to condemn the people (Ezekiel 15:1-8)

He used the metaphors of vines and vineyards to judge the Israelites.

- **Right before the Babylonian Exile in 586BC**

“*Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest [God said], which I have given to the fire for fuel, [like that vine] so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* (Ezekiel 15:6)

It was condemnation all around, and God used the metaphors of vines and vineyards to foretell and declare it. Metaphors for the people and place of God’s kingdom.

But praise God that wasn’t the end. Because even in the midst of all that . . .

Asaph used them to give us hope (Psalm 80:7-19)

Isaiah dropped a bomb and Ezekiel dropped the hammer, but Asaph dropped a hint. A hint of *hope* for God’s vine and vineyard. Psalm 80:7-19.

Psalm 80, as the headline reads, is a testimony of Asaph. A Psalm apparently based on his thoughts centuries earlier.

[7] *Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!* [8] *You brought a vine out of Egypt [referring to the Israelites; Exodus 15]; you drove out the nations and planted it.* God planted them in the land of Israel.

[9] *You cleared the ground for it [the vine]; it took deep root and filled the land [the vineyard].* [10] *The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches [metaphors for the expansion and blessing of God’s people].* [11] *It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.* Probably the Red Sea and the Euphrates River. The blessings of God’s people and kingdom were far and wide.

[12] *Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?* [13] *The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.* He’s not talking about animals.

[14] *Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine,* [15] *the stock that your right hand planted [as the vinedresser], and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.* Referring to God’s people as his son, while foreshadowing his only Son. Have regard for what *he* will do.

[16] *They [your enemies] have burned it with fire [the vine and vineyard]; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!* [Looks can kill.]

[17] *But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!* Let your hand of protection and provision be on the one you’ve anointed.

[18] *Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!*

[19] *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

Now, we can’t be *sure* of the circumstances here, but it seems that the Psalmist is writing sometime after the Babylonian Exile. Hence his question in v12, “Why have you broken down its walls?” The walls of Jerusalem. And v16 – *They have burned it with fire.* Both of which the Babylonians did.

And he calls out to God on behalf of his people to reverse their fortune. To change things.

[19] *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!* In other words, look favorably on us. Rebuke us no longer. It’s a cry for help. And hope.

But the interesting part, is that he appeals to a *messiah*. Someone on whom God’s hand would rest. God’s favor. Like in v15 where he says, *have regard . . . for the son whom you made strong for yourself.* And v17 – *Let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself.*

If it were just v15, we might conclude that he’s simply talking about Israel as a whole. Because the prophets often did that. They often referred to God’s people as God’s *son*. But with the addition of v17 it seems like he’s narrowing the field and talking about an individual. A king and leader.

So it seems even then, some 600 years before Christ, that God put it in the heart of the Psalmist to yearn for a deliverer. To hint at someone who had the strength and power to *restore* the vineyard. Someone who would influence the people to call on God's name, receive life, and be saved. It's all there. A hint of hope.

And Asaph uses the metaphors of vines and vineyards to give it. Recalling and drawing on the promises and prophecies of Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. Don't miss the connection.

And then we come to the New Testament. Where . . .

Jesus used them to change everything (Mark 12:1-12)

Jesus used the metaphors of vines and vineyards to change everything. Especially the recipients of the promise. Turn with me to Mark 12:1-12.

The setting here is the temple in Jerusalem on Tuesday of Passion Week. A few days before Good Friday.

[1] *And he began to speak to them in parables.* Them, referring to the chief priests, scribes, and elders; the leaders and representatives of the people. He began telling them a fictional story to illustrate a point.

[1b] *“A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower [just like God said in Isaiah 5], and leased it to tenants and went into another country.*

[2] *When the season came [harvest], he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.* [There it is again. Fruit.] [3] *And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.* [Think Old Testament prophets.]

[4] *Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.* [5] *And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.* Like we find in Hebrews 11 (v36-38).

[6] *He had still one other [one other servant], a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ [7] But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours [referring to the vineyard and its fruit; the kingdom and its blessings; it will be ours].’ [8] And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.*

[9] *What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.* If Isaiah was a bombshell, that's nuclear.

[10] *Have you not read this Scripture: “‘The stone that the builders rejected [referring to the Messiah] has become the cornerstone [the most important part of the kingdom; the most important part of the vineyard]; [11] this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”* Have you never heard that, he asks?

[12] *And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them.* [You think!] *So they left him and went away.*

Speaking to the Jews, Jesus says, “Enough is enough. You obviously don't *want* me to rule over you, so I won't. You obviously can't *handle* the privileges and responsibilities of my kingdom, so I'm giving it to those who can.” He changed everything.

• Incorporating everyone who believes, Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:16)

As bad as it was for God to withdraw and withhold his blessing and protection, and give the Israelites over to destruction like he said through Isaiah and Ezekiel, their assumption all along is that he would preserve a remnant and start over. Just like he had done before.

But here, Jesus takes the withdrawal a step further. A giant leap further. Because he not only rejects the *Jews* who don't believe, but includes the Gentiles who *do*. V9b – *He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.* Referring to Gentiles.

It's something we not only see here in the gospels, but throughout the New Testament. The book of Acts, the Epistles, and even Revelation.

Speaking to the Jews in **Acts 13:46**, Paul and Barnabas said: *“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life [you don't want to have anything to do with it], behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”*

Same thing in **Romans 1:16** – *I am not ashamed of the gospel [Paul said], for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek [the Gentile].*

And speaking to the Gentile believers in Ephesus, Paul says in **Ephesians 2:19** – *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.* The kingdom of God. The vineyard.

Asaph hinted at a Messiah to save and *restore* the vineyard, but when he came, God gave it to others. People of *faith*. From *every* tribe, tongue, and nation. (Revelation 7:9)

So what started as a promise to a few became a blessing to many. A blessing to the *world*. Incorporating everyone who believes in Jesus. *They* inherit the kingdom. *They* receive the vineyard.

Now, some people say, “Oh my goodness, you can't say that God withdrew his promise to the Jews! That means he might withdraw his promises to us!”

To which I say, “No, it doesn't mean that; and yes, we can say it. And should. Because that's exactly what God did.

There's no getting around the fact that he told Abraham and Moses “I will plant you in the land,” and then spoke through Isaiah to remove and destroy them. Nor can we get around the fact that Jesus said he's giving the kingdom to others. Or the apostles who said that the recipients are people of *faith*. There's no getting around all that.

And if that's not a withdrawal of God's promise to the Jews, I don't know what is.

But that doesn't mean he defaulted on his promise. Or abandoned it.

It doesn't mean he tore it up and threw it in the garbage can. And it certainly doesn't mean God might fail to keep his promises to us.

It means he redirected the *fulfillment* of his word. The recipients of his promise. To those who believe in his Son.

So yes, God withdrew his promise of a kingdom to unbelieving *Jews*, but that doesn't mean he might withdraw his promises to us. After all, the Bible is complete. The Canon is closed. We know the end of the story. And nothing can be added or taken away from it. (Revelation 22:18-19)

But the fact remains, Jesus used the metaphors of vines and vineyards to change everything. And the ultimate change was . . .

- **Identifying himself as the vine (John 15:1)**

John 15:1. They had just eaten the bread and drank the cup at The Last Supper, and were on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, when he said, "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*" The caretaker. The overseer. The founder and perfecter of the kingdom.

Now, I don't know for sure, but I have to believe that the disciples were still talking about what he said on *Tuesday*. In Mark 12. Two days earlier. That God was giving the farm away. That someone *else* would inherit his kingdom.

But here, he's changes the metaphor altogether. To say *he's* the farm. *He's* the vine in the midst of God's kingdom. *He's* the one who produces all the fruit. *He's* the source and sustenance of life. And he's the means by which others will *inherit* all the blessings. By being connected to him. It's stunning. And glorious. And awesome. And amazing.

When Jesus said, "*I am the true vine,*" he not only recalled the vast history of God's work of redemption, he conveyed the finality and fulfillment of it in himself. To say, "I am God's ultimate *planting*, God's ultimate means, to establish his kingdom and sustain it for all time. Sustain *us* for all time. All who believe.

No longer are the *people* of God his pleasant planting, per Moses and Isaiah, but the *Son* of God. The one God had in mind all along. *He's* the vine.

And as if that's not enough, check this out. He's the vine . . .

- **The fruit of which we remember at The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29)**

That's the *last* dot to connect. Matthew 26:26-29.

Isaiah dropped a bomb, Ezekiel dropped the people, and Asaph dropped a hint. But Jesus exceeded them all by including *everyone* who believes, declaring *himself* as the vine, and giving us something tangible by which to remember it. The *fruit* of the vine.

[26] Now as they were eating [The Last Supper], Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." [27] And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, [28] for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The cup they held and the wine they drank was symbolic of the blood he was about to shed. Securing our salvation by forgiving our sins and guaranteeing our life once and for all. That's the *covenant*. The *New Covenant*. God's promise of salvation.

And then he said this, connecting the dots and *completing* the picture. *[29] I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom [my Father's vineyard]."*

And then, just a few hours later, in John 15, Jesus identified himself *as* the vine. They had just left the upper room, having just heard Jesus refer to the cup as the *fruit* of the vine, when he said, "I *am* the vine." That's no coincidence.

In fact, I think he tied the two together in such close proximity – the *fruit* of the vine and himself *as* the vine – to emphasize the meaning. That the cup, containing the fruit of the *physical* vine, represents the fruit of *the* Vine. Namely, his shed blood that saves our soul and makes us whole. His shed blood, that gives us *life* and sustains the vineyard.

That's the *true* fruit of the vine. Which makes his statement all the more loaded and the metaphor all the more meaningful.

Summary

"*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*" Connecting the dots from the Old Testament to the New and the New to our lives, in one sentence.

Let's pray and get to the Table.

Prayer – *All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you!* (Psalm 145:10) Including us. For the work of your Son and the work in our lives. Thank you for opening our eyes to wonders of your Word, and your vineyard, and your Vine. In whose name we pray.

You Are Loved