FRUITFUL

John 15:1-17

1“"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 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. 5 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. 6 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. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 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. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.
Chapter 14 ended with Jesus saying — *Rise, let us go from here.* They don’t actually cross over the Brook Kidron onto the Mount of Olives and into the Garden of Gethsemane until the first verse of Chapter 18. Was this one of those moments — like many in our own life, where someone says, “Let’s get going,” but you never seem to leave the room? Or does Jesus continue the discourse as they’re walk together through the Temple precincts towards the Brook Kidron and ultimately to Gethsemane? Is he stopping and talking to them on the way until we read in *John 18:1* — When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered?

Jesus loved to use His immediate environment as a springboard for a teaching moment. The visual environment of Temple Precincts certainly lent itself to the subject matter of this passage.

History tells us that the door to Herod’s temple was about 60 feet high. The frame of the door had a huge golden vine that wound its way around part of the frame, and there were clusters of grape fashioned from gold.

**QUOTE:** Jewish historian Josephus (Wars of the Jews 5.210) — “but that gate which was at this end of the first part of the house was....all over covered with gold, as was its whole wall about it; it had also *golden vines* above it, from which *clusters of grapes hung* as tall as a man’s height;”

**QUOTE:** William Barclay; The Gospel of John, Vol 2 — *Many a great man had counted it an honour to give gold to mould a new bunch of grapes or even a new grape on to that vine.*

It was reported that there were also vines and clusters of grapes above the East Gate — also called the Golden Gate. All of that was because vine was the very symbol of Israel. In fact, “*On the Maccabean coinage Israel was represented by a vine*” (Dods).¹

**Psalm 80:7-16** speaks of Israel being the vine of God

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!  

You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it (Moses leading Israel out of Egypt and Joshua leading Israel into the land of promise).  

You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.  

The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches.  

It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.  

Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?  

The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.  

Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine,  

the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.  

They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!

Isaiah 5:1-7  

God says that Israel is His vineyard. He says that He took care of them — built a hedge about them — put a watchtower over the nation — and yet they brought forth rotten grapes. They didn’t bring forth any good fruits.

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 briers 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!
Ezekiel 15 tells the same story of ancient Israel as the vineyard of God and the vine of God.

Hosea 10:1 says that Israel, God’s vineyard brought forth fruit for themselves. Rather then the fruit of their lives being poured out in the worship of God they poured it out to idols.

KJV Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself:

NLT How prosperous Israel is— a luxuriant vine loaded with fruit. But the richer the people get, the more pagan altars they build.

Matthew 21 In the last days before He was crucified Jesus was ministering on the Temple Mount — he confronted the Pharisees and Sadducees and told them the parable of the vineyard.

There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. 35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. 37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ 39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41 They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” ……45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

They understood that it was about them failing to care for the people of God because they understood that Israel was the vine or the vineyard of Jehovah.
So Jesus — possibly walking with his disciples through the Temple Precincts that were filled with the imagery of fruitful vines — Says to them

1“...I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser..."

This is the last of the seven I AM statements made by Jesus in John’s Gospel. I am the true vine — the idea is genuine.

QUOTE: A.T. Robertson — “The vine the genuine.”

There are actually three different vines found in Scripture. We’ve already seen the nation of Israel as the Lord’s Vine. There is also “the vine of the earth” described in Revelation 14:14–20. This is the world system living in rebellion to God, ripening for God’s judgment. The “vine of the earth” will be cut down and destroyed when Jesus Christ returns.

Jesus presents Himself as the TRUE VINE — the GENUINE.

There are several things to keep in mind as we walk through the passage lest we get sidetracked and miss THE POINT of the metaphor.

QUOTE: J.C. Ryle — These verses, we must carefully remember, contain a parable. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule which applies to all Christ’s parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. The mistakes into which Christians have fallen by neglecting this rule, are neither few nor small.

The Calvinist and the Arminian alike strain the details to draw conclusions. Some strain the image to support their position that the Church has replaced Israel. Jesus is going to talk about abiding in Him — which in the literal details of branches and vines would be an odd concept to even mention, because a literal branch has an abiding union with the vine. We must remember Jesus is not speaking about branches — he’s speaking

about human lives — \textit{If you abide in me. Again — You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit}

His thrust is not on \textit{becoming} a Christian but on becoming a \textit{productive} Christian. The main idea is that of being FRUITFUL. The concept of man deriving life \textit{from} God and producing fruit \textit{to} and \textit{for} the glory of God has its origins in the Book of Beginnings — \textbf{Genesis}.

\textbf{Genesis 1:28} And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth

They were to be fruitful in having children — multiplying those who would bear the image of God — extending God’s influence and living as agents of God’s purposes — throughout all of God’s creation on this planet.

God uses the metaphor of being FRUITFUL throughout the Old Testament to describe those who love Him and serve Him and are being blessed by Him.

\textbf{Genesis 49:22} “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall.

\textbf{Leviticus 26:29} I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you.

\textbf{Psalm 105:24} And the Lord made his people very fruitful

\textbf{Jeremiah 23:3} Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

We find the language of being FRUITFUL used in the New Testament to describe the life of the man or woman trusting, loving Jesus and serving.

\textbf{Romans 1:13 (KJV)} Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

\textbf{Romans 7:4} in order that we may bear fruit for God.
Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Philippians 1:11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

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.

Hebrews 12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Loving people, repenting of sin, serving in ministry, giving money to God’s work, doing the things that demonstrate our love for God and our love for our neighbor are demonstrations of fruitfulness.

The MAIN LESSON is NOT that of eternal security, or the possibility of losing your salvation. The MAIN LESSON is that of being FRUITFUL; and that being FRUITFUL is inextricably bound to relationship with Jesus.

In the lesson there are THREE characters. Jesus is the vine. The Father is the vinedresser. The believer is the branch (verse 5). Let’s walk through them.

I. JESUS IS THE VINE — THE BELIEVER IS THE BRANCH

5I 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

The words are loaded with tremendous truths about the POSITION of the believer and the PRODUCTION (fruitfulness) of the believer. There is a profoundly simple, yet sublime reality in the world of viticulture (the study of grape cultivation). The branch is not the vine, nor is the vine the branch. Yet their union is the closest union that can be conceived. Jesus uses this
imagery to communicate the intimate union between the believer and Jesus.
The branch **cannot** produce its own life — it must derive its life from the vine. THAT IS the nature and reality of Christianity. A Christian is not someone merely religious or moral — a Christian is man or woman united to Christ — receiving LIFE from Jesus *(I am the way, the Truth, THE LIFE).*
The vine produces its fruit through the branches. THAT is the nature of the Christian life. The Christian derives his or her life from Jesus. Jesus produces HIS fruit through the believer. The living branch is truly ‘in’ the vine — the life of the vine is truly ‘in’ the branch. There is NO LIFE and NO FRUIT apart from Jesus. The sooner the Christian discovers that he is nothing but a branch, the more fruitful he will become, because he will realize that He has NO LIFE apart from Jesus and can bear NO FRUIT apart from Jesus.

**QUOTE:** **J.C. RYLE** — *It is the whole secret of the branch’s life, strength, vigor, beauty, and fertility. Separate from the parent stem, it has no life of its own. The sap and juice that flow from the stem are the origin and maintaining power of all its leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit. Cut off from the stem, it must soon wither and die.*

That begs a couple of questions — let’s get to the one that distracts most people from the main lesson — **Who are the fruitless branches of verse 2 and verse 6 that are taken away?**

*2Every branch of mine (in me) that does not bear fruit he takes away*(prunes away or cuts off), ...... *6If 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*

**Who they are NOT** — It is hard to think of Israel (as a nation) as being IN JESUS when Israel as a nation, and so many Jews individually, never put their trust in Jesus. It is equally difficult to think of these branches representing once saved men and women who “lost” their salvation — because that would place us in direct opposition to what Jesus has taught before this in John’s Gospel.

**John 6:47** *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.*
Being cut off and thrown into hell is not very eternal. Just saying! In John 10 Jesus said that the believer rests securely in the hands of the Father — that nothing should trouble us because God could never lose one of his children.

**John 10:28-29** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

**QUOTE: D.A. Carson** — It is more satisfactory to recognize that asking the in me language to settle such disputes is to push the vine imagery too far. The transparent purpose of the verse is to insist that there are no true Christians without some measure of fruit. Fruitfulness is an infallible mark of true Christianity. 3

**WHO they might be** — IF we are going to strain the metaphor in regards to in me, we have to think of them as ‘branches’ with real contact with Jesus. We can certainly look at a guy like Judas to demonstrate that you can have real contact with Jesus and yet perish. There are a number of passages in the New Testament that speak of those with some degree of connection with Jesus, or with the Christian church, whose lives prove that they never had the been transformed by the life of Jesus

**Matthew 13:20-22** As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

**Hebrews 3:14** For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

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1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

2 John 9 Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.

QUOTE: J.C. RYLE — There are myriads of professing Christians in every Church whose union with Christ is only outward and formal. Some of them are joined to Christ by baptism and Church-membership. Some of them go even further than this, and are regular communicants and loud talkers about religion. But they all lack the one thing needful. Notwithstanding services, and sermons, and sacrament, they have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ, and Christ in them. Their union with Him is only nominal, and not real. They have "a name to live," but in the sight of God they are dead.

One thing is certain in the metaphor — there are dead branches in it — and these dead branches are removed and burned. Did you know that the dead wood from a vine is useless for building — they're only good for burning?

Ezekiel 15:1-5 And the word of the Lord came to me: 2“Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? 3Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? 4Behold, 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? 5Behold, 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!

I know that even in church circles it is unpopular for people to say there is a real hell. But this is Jesus speaking — and His words should concern the man and woman who is not IN CHRIST (position). You need to look at your life and ask the question — “If I am not bearing fruit, why is that? Is that because I am an unbeliever; not connected to Christ? Or is that because I am not abiding in Christ, and I need his grace to lift me up so I can start to grow and bear fruit?
**WHAT they might be** — In viticulture there are two general principles that are carefully observed. **First** — all dead wood must be ruthlessly removed. **Second** — the live wood must be cut back drastically.

All dead wood must be ruthlessly removed because dead wood becomes the home for insects and disease that can harm the productivity and beauty of the vine. This could possibly be a picture of growth on a branch that is dead — and must be removed. More on that when we get to the role of the Father — who is the vinedresser.

**THE NEXT QUESTION IS** — **What does it mean to ABIDE in Jesus?**

This word is used **ten times** in the first eleven verses of John 15. Again — this is a truth in the metaphor that is lost if we strain to keep it perfectly literal. While abiding is natural to the branch and the vine, it must be cultivated in the Christian life. To abide in Christ has nothing to do with trying to keep ourselves saved. By faith — the believer is UNITED with Christ — is IN Christ — in the genuine vine. Abiding is more than POSITION. Abiding is about fostering a trusting, intimate, relationship with Jesus by which HIS FRUIT is produced in my life.

Abide = “dependence upon, rely upon, wait for, draw strength from.”

Jesus said four things that define our relationship with Him —

1.) Come to Me (as Savior)
2.) Learn of Me (as Teacher)
3.) Follow Me (as Master)
4.) Abide in Me (as Life).

To abide is the highest requirement of Christ and applies **only** to His those who are in Him — His disciples. Without depending upon, relying upon, waiting for, drawing strength from Jesus we can not be FRUITFUL.

How did Jesus live out His abiding life with the Father? He had constant contact with the Father. He often took deliberate steps to withdraw to be alone with the Father

**QUOTE**: Spurgeon — “Be not content with an interview now and then, but seek always to retain His company.”
THE CONCEPT OF ABIDING IS HUGE in regards to processing every day life and decisions. Will this foster nearness to Jesus or will it hinder nearness to Jesus? Will this bring me into more intimate contact with Jesus or will this come between me and Jesus? Will this foster “dependence upon, reliance upon, wait for, and drawing strength from Jesus?”

CLOSING

FOR THE UNBELIEVER

These words of Jesus were not intended as subject matter for some existential discussion. Jesus has made a PROCLAMATION — This is reality. Jesus is the genuine Vine — and you are either a branch IN Jesus and the LIFE of Jesus is IN you — or you are dead wood, useless for building and only good for burning. This is reality — if you are not in the Jesus, the genuine vine, you are in the vine of the earth, waiting judgment.

QUOTE: DM Lloyd-Jones; The Kingdom of God; Crossway Books — p. 16-17

The Good News is that Jesus died on the cross so that you and I can be forgiven of our sin, taken out of the vine of the earth and grafted INTO HIM. The moment we believe with our hearts the message of the Gospel we are joined to Jesus in the most intimate union imaginable — we are IN Jesus — and HIS LIFE is IN us.

FOR THE BELIEVER

In the passage there are THREE ACTIONS producing THREE RESULTS. Each of them has to do with being FRUITFUL. Remember — Fruitfulness is an infallible mark of true Christianity;  

1. Abiding — Result = Fruit
2. Pruning (next week) — Result = More Fruit
3. Continued Abiding — Result = Much Fruit.

In Jacob’s last words to Joseph (last weeks Bible Bus Gen.49:22) he said, *Genesis 49:22* “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. THAT would be FRUITFUL! Your life like a branch extending out from the vine — loaded with fruit — to those who stand outside the wall!

**NEXT WEEK we continue with the VINEDRESSER, the PRUNING and the FRUIT.**