Jesus – The True Vine 1 –the Vine Dresser

1. Introduction

a. Today we are going to consider the last of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel. Jesus said, "I am the True Vine" to his closest friends gathered around Him at the Passover supper. It was only a short time before Judas would betray Him; in fact, Judas had already left to do his infamous deed.

b. Jesus was preparing the eleven men left for His pending crucifixion, His resurrection, and His subsequent departure for heaven. He had just told them that He would be leaving them (John 14:2). Knowing how disturbed they would feel, He gave them this lovely metaphor of the True Vine as one of His encouragements.

c. Jesus wanted His friends, not only those eleven, but those of all time, to know that He was not going to desert them, even though they would no longer enjoy His physical presence. His living power—His spiritual reality—would continue to nourish and sustain them just as the roots and trunk of a grape vine produce the energy that nourishes and sustains its branches while they develop their fruit.

d. Jesus wanted us to know that, even though we cannot see Him, we are as closely connected to Him as the branches of a vine are connected to its stem. Our desire to know and love Him and the power to serve Him will keep flowing into and through us as long as we "abide" in Him.

e. The best thing we can ever experience is to be united to Christ. To be "in Christ" Is to enjoy union with Christ. When this is fully understood, nothing is greater experientially, and nothing is greater theologically. You cannot experience anything greater than the fullness of union with Christ and nothing reaches higher in theology, and nothing is more theologically comprehensive than the fullness of union with Christ.

f. Our passage today has proved to be enormously important in both the experience and the articulation of the doctrine of union with Christ. To understand what Jesus was sharing with his disciples at the very end of his earthly life is essential to us living out our Christian lives in union with Christ and knowing the power and joy of abiding in him.

John 15:1-11 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. **2** 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. **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** <u>These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.</u>*

2. My father is the vine dresser

a. In this passage there are three key components – the vive, the branches and the vinedresser. The passage begins by making something very clear which we need to consider

before we consider the Vine. Immediately after making his statement that he is the vine Jesus also make a statement about the Father and identifies him as the vinedresser. Without an understanding of the work of the vine dresser we do not understand the great importance of remaining in the vine. So this week we will be considering that and then next week we will look at what it means to know Jesus as the Vine.

b. Just before our passage, Jesus has made the statement *"I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here."* (John 14:31) In other words, Jesus puts his entire ministry, especially these final hours, under the command of his Father. *"I do as the Father has commanded me."* The Father is overseeing the whole thing. Jesus will give his life. Jesus will become the bread of life, and the water of life, and the door of life. But the Father himself is tending to every detail so that this work will accomplish exactly what has been planned.

c. The statement that the Father is the vinedresser, is a picture or metaphor, of what he has just said. As he completes his work in the next hours, he becomes the source of all life and fruitfulness — the vine. And the Father is tending this vine and seeing to it that the vine will bear all the living fruit he intends. And that includes his attention to Jesus, the vine, and to his disciples, the branches.

d. It is important we understand the work of the vinedresser so that we understand that this description of Jesus and his relationship with his disciples, and us, is dependent on the work of the Father. It is not just about the vine and branches (him and us) but also the vine and the vinedresser (him and his Father). There are two things the Father does that are important for us to know as we abide in the vine and get our life and our power from the vine.

e. One is that God takes away fruitless branches, and the other is that God prunes fruitful branches. He cuts away ***the lifeless***, and he cultivates ***the living***. He destroys, and he disciplines. As Jesus said in Luke 8:

Luke 8:18 *To the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.*

3. United then lost?

a. Let us look at these two works of the vinedresser one at a time:

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.

b. This is a cutting away and a destroying as described in v.*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

c. Jesus used another metaphor in Matthew 13 to point in a similar direction:

Matt. 13:38-40 *The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,* ***39*** *and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels.* ***40*** *Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age.*

d. Which raises the question: Can a branch, a disciple of Jesus, have eternal life in union with Jesus and then lose it and be finally condemned? If a branch in him can be taken away and burned up does this mean that union with Christ is not permanent, but may exist and then

not exist? Can we be "in Christ" and then "accursed away from Christ" forever? Does Christ not keep his own?

e. Verse 2 says that there is at least some sense that a branch can be "in me" and then cut off and perish. Given what Jesus clearly teaches in the Gospel of John, can a person be born again (as in John 3:3, 5, 7–8) and then lost? Can a person be child of God through faith (as in John 1:12) and then lost? Can a person be one of Christ's sheep (as in John 10:14–16) and then not his sheep?

f. In John's gospel Jesus frequently teaches that this is not so and that God has chosen a people for himself, that he gives them to the Son, and the Son keeps them infallibly forever. However, there is a kind of attachment to Jesus, a kind of disciple, a kind of believing that is not saving. And the difference between the two is abiding and fruit-bearing.

John 6:37,39 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. . .. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.*

g. In other words, God has a people before they come to Jesus.

John 17:6 *Yours they were, and you gave them to me*

John 6:37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me*

John 6:39 *I lose nothing of all the that the Father has given me, but raise it up on the last day.*

h. These are the strongest possible statements about the security of those whom the Father gives to Jesus. So, who is this branch that is "in me" and is lost? The key is to realise that in the Gospel of John there are believers who are not true believers. There are disciples who are not true disciples and there is among the twelve one of them Jesus calls a devil and knew it from the beginning when he chose him

John 6:64 - 71 *But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)* ***65*** *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."*

66 *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.* ***67*** *So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?"* ***68*** *Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,* ***69*** *and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."* ***70*** *Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil."* ***71*** *He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.*

i. In the same way there are branches who are not true branches. They are "in him," but not truly "in him." In John 8 Jesus addresses the Jews who had been listening to him teach.

John 8:30-31 *As he was saying these things, many believed in him.****31*** *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,* ***32*** *and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* ***33*** *They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"*

j. However, Jesus then addresses these so-called believers:

John 8:37 *I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.*

k. The belief that is being described here is the "belief" of miracle-seekers. This was a "belief" that provided a kind of attachment to Jesus, but not a true one.

l. The same thing is true of the word "disciple." There was a kind of disciple who actually turned away and no longer walked with him. It wasn't about walking with him, listening to him or being part of the miracles. Jesus makes it clear what it is about in v.31 when he says, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples"*. There are disciples and there are "true disciples." There are believers, and there are "true believers." There are branches and true branches. Judas is the clearest example of a branch that was attached to Jesus for three years. In the circle of the twelve, in a close relationship with Jesus but not a true believer.

m. So can a person be born again and then lost? Can a person be a child of God through faith and then lost? Can a person be one of Christ's sheep and then not his sheep? Can a disciple be a true disciple and then not a disciple? I don't believe so. The branches that are broken off are the so-called believers of John 2:23 and 8:30, and the so-called disciples of John 6:66, and the Judas of John 6:65. They are in the vine, "in me," but not abiding in it.

n. And the explicit link between these false disciples and John 15 is verse 8:

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

o. This is parallel with John 8:31, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."* Abiding in the vine, does not **make you** a true disciple. It **proves** you are one.

p. Jesus is preparing his disciples for two things that will come: defection from the inside and persecution from the outside. They are not to fear, the defectors (the Judases and false disciples) will succeed but will be broken off in due time and burned. The vinedresser has it all under control.

4. The work of discipline

a. But now we look at the second work of the vinedresser. The vinedresser — the Father — prunes the true branches, he cultivates, he disciplines.

John 15:2 *…. and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

b. Pruning means cutting and it's a sobering picture. The best exposition of this work of the Father is probably in Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:6, 10–11 *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives…. **10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **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.*

c. The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 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.

d. In the context of Hebrews 12, this discipline is happening through the persecution of sinners (Hebrews 12:4). And here in John 15:20, Jesus said, *"A servant is not greater than his master.*

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Persecution is not the only way the Father cuts and prunes the true branches, but it is one way.

e. What Jesus wants us to see is that our union with him is not isolated from our external life experiences. It is influenced by these experiences. And he wants us to know: His Father governs these experiences. Persecution and hardship and calamity to do not come to the branches willy-nilly. They are not aimless or random. They are the work of the vinedresser and they have a purpose, namely, more fruit.

f. Which means that our experience of union with Christ (our attachment to the vine) is strengthened and intensified and enlivened by Father-controlled external experiences. There are great internal workings in union with Christ from the Holy Spirit and from Christ and from the Father. But here the focus is on the external element. The vinedresser is not the sap or the vine. But his work in pruning, cutting, caring has a profound bearing on our experience of the sap and the vine.

g. A picture of how this works would be 2 Corinthians 1:8–9.

2 Cor.1:8-9 *We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*

h. Paul's abiding in Christ was deeply assisted by this pruning that took him to the point of death. So the point of verse 2 is that Jesus is preparing his disciples for defection from within and persecution from without. And he is encouraging and emboldening them that his Father is in control of both. No betrayer will escape, and all their hardships will draw them deeper into the enjoyment of union with him.

5. Conclusion

a. What we have seen in our first consideration of this passage is that there are two types of "Christian". There are those who follow because they want to be associated with Jesus. They want to experience the miracles, they want to listen to his teaching, they want to be part of the crowd.

b. Then there are those who want to truly know him so that they can submit to him and be transformed into his likeness. They will welcome the pruning, the discipline, because their motivation is to become like him. They are those who choose to abide and next week we will consider what that means and the nature of Jesus as the vine in which we abide. Those who chose the way that leads to joy.

John 15:11 *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*