Jesus – The True Vine 2 – Abiding Branches

1. Introduction

a. Today we are returning to the passage in John 15 where Jesus declares that he is the true vine.

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] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

b. Last week we considered the work of the vinedresser and the branches that do not bear fruit. This week we will consider how we can be the true branches that bear fruit and abide. As Jesus clearly states in the passage, *"the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."*

c. As with many of the metaphors Jesus used to describe himself, the vine was familiar to his listeners. All across the middle east vines grew to provide the wine that was part of everyday life. Growing and cultivating grapes was something everyone knew and so they could quickly understand the significance of the imagery being used. As we consider this passage we need to become familiar with the process of growing grapes and the nature of grape vines.

2. The Vine

a. As with all his previous "I am" statements Jesus makes it clear that there is no alternative. He is **the true vine.** Once again he uses the definite article but this time he adds the word "true" to make it completely clear that there is no other vine that can provide what is needed for the branches to bear fruit. Branches on a different vine will bear different fruit and, as we will see, the fruit that Jesus is talking about is the fruit that can only come from this vine.

b. His disciples were familiar with the idea of grafting in shoots to the vine and how those grafted shoots would go on to produce fruit of the variety of the root stock into which they were grafted. Jesus is setting before us a choice – which vine will you abide in, will you grow out of, will you be grafted into? The true vine or a false vine? Who will you draw your goodness and strength from? Whose fruit will you bear?

3. Branches

a. A branch is simply a bit of wood, brought forth by the vine for the one purpose of serving it in bearing its fruit. It is of the same nature as the vine, and it has one life and one spirit with it. Andrew Murray, in his wonderful devotional on this passage, identifies 4 lessons we can learn from the metaphor of being branches in the vine.

i Entire consecration

ii Perfect conformity

iii Absolute dependence

iv Undoubting confidence

b. **Entire consecration.** The branch exists for one purpose to which it is entirely given up, to bear the fruit the vine wishes to bring forth. Hence, there is one reason for being a branch, one purpose to our existence, that through us the heavenly Vine may bring forth his fruit. This is to understand and accept that we have been redeemed and live for one thing. As exclusively as the natural branches exist only to bring forth fruit so this is the purpose of our lives as those who have been planted by God into Christ and we are to give ourselves wholly to bear the fruit the Vine desires to bring forth

c. **Perfect conformity**. The branch is exactly like the vine in every aspect—the same nature, the same life, the same place, the same work. In all this they are inseparably one. Thus we need to know that we are partakers of the divine nature, that we have the very nature and spirit of Christ in us, and that our one calling is to yield ourselves to a perfect conformity to Christ. The branch is a perfect likeness of the vine; the only difference is the one is great and strong, and the source of strength; the other little and feeble, ever needing and receiving strength. The believer is, and is to be, the perfect likeness of Christ.

2 Peter 1:3-4 *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, **4** by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

d. **Absolute dependence.** The vine has its stores of life and sap and strength not for itself, but for the branches. The branches are and have nothing but what the vine provides and imparts. As believers we are called to a life of entire and unceasing dependence upon Christ. Day and night, every moment, Christ is to work in us all we need and what a blessed existence that becomes!

e. **Undoubting confidence**. The branch has no care; the vine provides all; it has but to yield itself and receive. This is the truth, that once we grasp it, leads to the blessed rest of faith which is the true secret of growth and strength.

Phil.4:12-13 *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

f. The secret to abundant and a peaceful life is to consent to becoming branches in the true vine. We have but one thing to do - be a branch - nothing more, nothing less! Just be a branch; Christ will be the Vine that gives us everything we need to bear fruit and the Vinedresser, the Father, who made the Vine what it is, will as surely make the branch what it ought to be.

4. Fruit

a. So what is fruit? It is that which the branch bears, not for itself, but for its owner; something that is to be gathered and taken away. The branch receives from the vine sap for its own life,

by which it grows thicker and stronger but this supply for its own maintenance is purely for the purpose to bear fruit.

b. Many Christians do not understand or accept this truth and therefore fail in their efforts and prayers to live the branch life. We can desire it earnestly; we can read and meditate and pray, and yet still fail, because we do not accept that the purpose of our salvation was to bear fruit not just grow stronger and become more satisfied as a branch. A strong branch with no fruit is of no use to the vinedresser.

c. Our desire needs to be to bear all the fruit which Christ is willing to give through us as living branches. We should be those who live in close and living union with him so that we bring satisfaction to the loving heart of the great vinedresser. Our desire should be to be all that the Father desires for us and to bring forth the fruit that will display his glory and satisfy others. To bring forth "more fruit". How do we do this?

d. The Word of God comes with divine authority to search and test our life. As true disciples we will surrender ourselves to the word that brings light and will earnestly ask that God Himself may show us what may be lacking in our character – the nature of the fruit he bears. The Word is meant to lead us on to a fuller experience of the Father's purpose of love, of Christ's fullness, and of the wonderful privilege of bearing **much** fruit.

e. This passage is really encouraging because it is the branch that is already bearing fruit that the vinedresser chooses to bear more fruit. The good news is that this is not a demand or instruction but an explanation that he will provide the means. He comes as a Father, who gives what He asks and works what He commands. He comes to us as the living branches of the living Vine and offers to work the more fruit in us, if we but yield ourselves into His hands.

f. The divine Vinedresser will do all that is needed to make us bear more fruit. All He asks is that we set our heart's desire on it, entrust ourselves to His working and care, and joyfully look to Him to do His perfect work in us. God has set His heart on more fruit; Christ waits to work it in us; we just need to joyfully look up to our divine vinedresser and our heavenly vine, to ensure we bear more fruit.

5. Cleaning and pruning

John 15:2-3 *every branch that does bear fruit <u>he prunes</u>, that it may bear more fruit.* ***3*** *Already you are <u>clean</u> because of the word that I have spoken to you.*

a. This verse can seem somewhat confusing. Jesus tells us we need to be pruned but then goes on to say we are already clean. This can feel contradictory until we see the Greek words that are used here.

b. The word for prune in v.2, *kathaire* is the same as the word for cleanse and the word for "clean" in v.3 is a related word, *katharoi*. In other words, it's more plain in Greek that Jesus is making a play on words. The Father prunes, that is cleanses, the branches to make them more suitable for fruit-bearing but we are already cleansed and suitable to bear more fruit. The word has already begun a good work in us.

c. Consider for a moment what this pruning or cleansing is. It is not the removal of weeds or thorns or anything from outside that may hinder the growth. It is the cutting off of the long shoots of the previous year, the removal of something that comes from within, that has been produced by the life of the vine itself. It is the removal of something that is a proof of

the vigour of its life. The more vigorous the growth has been, the greater the need for the pruning. It is the honest, healthy wood of the vine that has to be cut away.

d. The pruning knife is the Word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword, that pierces even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and that is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. Although affliction may instigate the pruning it is only when affliction leads to a submitting to the Word that it becomes a blessing; the lack of this heart cleansing through the Word is the reason that affliction is so often unsanctified.

Heb.4:12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

e. It was the words of Christ spoken to his disciples that had made them clean. Words out of whose mouth there went a sharp two-edged sword, as He had taught them. Their hidden thoughts were exposed as He humbled their pride, or reproved their lack of love, or foretold their forsaking Him. From the opening of His ministry in the Sermon on the Mount to His words of warning the last night, His Word had cleansed them. He had discovered and condemned all there was of self; they were now emptied and cleansed, ready for the incoming of the Holy Spirit.

f. We too, if we are to bear more fruit, need to submit to his cleansing and pruning by submitting to the word that comes as a two-edged sword. As we read or hear the Word, we need to wait first of all on Him to use it for His cleansing of the branch. We need to set our hearts upon His desire for more fruit. Trust Him and yield yourselves in simple childlike surrender to the cleansing work of His Word and Spirit, and we can be assured that His purpose will be fulfilled in us.

g. Let us not be too quick to apply the Word to others – let us first let it do its cleansing work in us. Let that two-edged sword divide soul and spirit and expose our wrongful emotions and desires. Let it bring discernment to the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Then let us surrender to the pruning of the vinedresser that those areas that have been in our own strength can be removed and his strength can flow through us in great power to bring forth more good fruit.

6. Abiding

John 15:4 *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.*

a. It's important to note that it us who need to choose to abide in him first; then he abides in us. We have to trust and obey, to detach ourselves from all else, to reach out after Him and cling to Him, to give ourselves over to Him. As we do this, through the grace He gives, a character is formed and a heart prepared for the fuller experience of "I in you."

b. God strengthens us with might by the Spirit in the inner man, and Christ dwells in the heart by faith. Many believers pray and long very earnestly for the filling of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ, and they wonder that they do not make more progress. The reason is often this: the "I in you" cannot come unless the "abide in me" is maintained.

c. When a new graft is placed in a vine and it survives this is because of two processes.

i First the graft shoots its little roots and fibres down into the stem and the stem grows up into the graft. A structural union is effected. In other words, the graft abides and becomes one with the vine.

ii Second, the sap of the vine enters this new structure and uses it as a passage through which the sap will flow up and show itself in the young shoots and leaves and fruit. This is the true union. Into the graft that abides in the stock, the stock enters with sap to abide in it.

d. Thus, before the sap of the Spirit can enter the body there must be a body prepared. The graft must have grown into the stem and be abiding in it before the sap can flow through to bring forth fruit. It is only as we abide in him by following him in lowly obedience, denying ourselves, forsaking the world, and in the body seeking to be conformed to him that we shall be able to receive and enjoy the "I in you."

e. We are in Christ. Christ is in us: our life taken up into His; His life received into ours; in a divine reality that words cannot express, we are in Him and He in us. And the words, "Abide in me, and I in you," tell us to believe in this divine mystery, and to count upon our Father the vinedresser, and Christ the vine, to make it divinely true. No thinking or teaching or praying can grasp it; it is a divine mystery of love.

f. Abiding is to be an act of the will and the whole heart. Just as there are degrees in seeking and serving God, "not with a perfect heart," or "with the whole heart," so there may be degrees in abiding. In regeneration the divine life enters us, but it does not all at once master and fill our whole being. This comes as a matter of command and obedience.

John 15:5 *Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

g. The danger is that we seek to bear fruit without the abiding, giving ourselves to work for God and to bear fruit, but with little of the true abiding. There needs to be a wholehearted losing of ourselves in Christ and His life. If we lack this vital relationship there will be much work but little fruit.

h. Jesus is very clear about what is flowing through this vine. "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you"* makes it clear that the sap that flows and produces life and fruit is his words. Abiding in the vine means receiving and believing and trusting in the words of Jesus. It means receiving the love of Jesus for the Father and for his people and the joy that Jesus has in the Father and in us. It means sharing the joy, the love, the words with Jesus. This is very similar to Paul in Galatians 3 and 5 saying the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy as we hear and trust the promises of Christ

Gal. 3:2 *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?*

Gal.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. **24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

7. Whatever you ask

John 15:7 *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

a. Many times this statement gets taken out of context. The context of asking is in relationship to more fruit. If we limit it to ourselves and our own needs we rob it of its power. Jesus was sending his disciples out and they were ready to give their lives for the world. Jesus is making it clear that through a continual abiding, a dependence on prayer they would receive all that was needed to complete that which they had been called to.

b. This is not a prayer for our needs it is a prayer to receive all that he knows we need to produce fruit. We are not asking to become stronger branches, we are asking for more sap, more cleansing and pruning, to produce more fruit. This is the only way to live the Christian life and bring glory to the Father.

c. We can only fulfil our calling to bear fruit by praying much. In Christ are hidden all the treasures men need, in him we are all blessed. He is full of grace and truth. But it needs prayer, much prayer, strong believing prayer to see these treasures released.

8. Conclusion

a. Finally, the goal of abiding is the glory of God. The whole design of our not being the vine, but being utterly dependent branches grafted into the vine, is to give glory to God.

John 15:8 *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

b. The whole design of depending on a vinedresser to manage the outward shape of our vine structure and our branch structure is so that God gets the glory for bringing it all about. Abiding in the vine then comes to be nothing more or less than the restful surrender of the soul to let Christ have all and work all, as completely as in nature the branch knows and seeks nothing but the vine.

c. Let us not be tempted to live out this life with our own understanding or in our own strength but let us choose to abide in the vine as our only source of strength and life. Day by day allowing his word to feed us, cleanse us and prune us.

d. As we consecrate ourselves to living for him; as we recognise we exist for his purposes to be revealed through us and in us; as we trust him completely to accomplish that which he has purposed; as we let his word transform us and conform us to his likeness; so we will bring glory to him by the fruit of our lives.

e. Nothing of any spiritual, eternal significance is possible apart from this abiding in the vine. We are not dealing here with something marginal or optional. If we are not united to the vine so that Christ's life is flowing into us, then his words, his love, his joy will be utterly and totally barren. Nothing of any lasting value will come from us.

John 15:5 *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.*