

I AM THE TRUE VINE

I. CONTEXT

A. PRECEDING EVENTS IN SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

- Jesus' anointment [by Mary, sister of Lazarus]
- Triumphal entry [Palm Sunday]
- Cleansing of the Temple
- Cursing of the fig tree
- Six parables about the coming Kingdom of Heaven
- Several encounters with Pharisees and Sadducees
- Predictions about End Times
- Lord's Supper—and Foot-washing
- Predicted Judas's betrayal—and Peter's denial
- Comforted His disciples—Jn 14
- Then He said: "Let us go from here"—14:31

READ TEXT HERE—15:1-11

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 **Abide** in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it **abides** in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you **abide** in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides** in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not **abide** in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are 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 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also 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 so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.

B. KEY EVENTS FRESH IN DISCIPLES' MEMORY

1. **Cursing of Fig Tree**—which never bore fruit again!!!
2. **Parable of Vineyard**
 - a. Only *full* parable in Mark and Luke after entering Jerusalem [fig-tree abbreviated]
 - b. **Killing** vineyard owner's son—obvious connection with prediction of His death
 - c. Jesus' controversial **challenge**—provoked Pharisees

Mt 21:43—Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

C. OVERVIEW

1. CHAPTER 15—describes disciples' [and our] **relationships**:
 - With Jesus—**vv 1-11**—branches producing fruit
 - With each other—**vv 12-17**—love one another

- To the world—**vv 18-27**—*not of the world*—so, persecuted, like Jesus
2. THIS SECTION—The True Vine
- Dressing the Vine—**vv 1-3**
 - Producing Fruit—**vv 4-7**
 - God's Two Purposes for the Vineyard—**vv 8-11**

D. THREE CONTEXTS

1. **Lord's Supper**—vine provided wine
2. **Temple**—Golden vine adorned Herod's temple
 - On trellis over the Temple gate
 - Almost 40 feet long—grapes the size of a man
 - Uppermost part was 100 feet from the ground
3. **Mount of Olives**
 - Kidron valley—walked past vineyards
 - Where they burnt dead vines

II. DRESSING THE VINE—VERSES 1-3

A. **VERSE 1—JESUS IS THE TRUE VINE—THE FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER**

1. 'I AM' divine dimension
 - a. Background: Jesus is in the Father—and the Father is in Him

14:10-11—Do you not believe that I AM in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.
 - b. *Unique* passage—shows divine [I AM] umbilical connections
 1. The **only** I AM saying that **connects** Christ directly with **other persons**
 2. The others are about Christ's own nature
 - I AM He—the Christ—Jn 4
 - I AM the Bread of Life—Jn 6
 - I AM the Light of the World—Jn 8
 - I AM the Door and the Good Shepherd—Jn 10
 - I AM the Resurrection and the Life—Jn 11
 - I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life—Jn 14
 3. This one shows how He *connects*—in two ways—with:
 - The Vinedresser—His Father—**verse 1**
 - The branches—His followers—**verse 5**
2. The **TRUE VINE**—parallels **TRUE LIGHT (1:9)**

- **Real thing**—not **false**
- **Complete**—not **defective**
- **Actual**—not **theoretical** or imaginary
- **Original**—not **manufactured** by men
- **Dependable**—not **uncertain**
- **Productive**—not **barren**

3. The **TRUE VINE**—contrasted with **PRETENDERS**

a. **Israel**—in the OT Israel was God’s vine

1. The vine—a symbol for Israel in the OT

Ps 80—Is 27—Hos 10

2. Later a symbol of a **disobedient** Israel (Ezek 17:6–10)
 - It was **ripe for judgment**— (**Isa** 5:1–7)
 - It had become **wild** and **dried up**—(**Jer** 2:21)
 - It therefore was to be **burned up**—(**Ezek** 15:1–8; 19:10–14)

3. On **Maccabean** coinage—Israel was pictured as a vine

b. **Greek ideal** of ‘true’

1. Greeks said perfection could not be physical
2. Jesus defied this false philosophy
 - He was **God incarnate**—the Word made flesh
 - He purposefully used physical things to describe Himself

B. VERSE 2—TWO TYPES OF BRANCHES—UNPRODUCTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE

1. **Unproductive** branches

a. What happens to them?

- **Verse 2—action**—the Father Vinedresser removes them
- **Verse 2—cause**—they do not produce fruit
- **Verse 4—reason**—they do not ‘abide’ in the vine
- **Verse 6—result**—cast into fire and destroyed

b. **Controversial passage**—different possible interpretations

1. **True believers** who do not produce

- a. They are cut off—and lose their salvation

- b. Problems with this interpretation

- Goes against security promised in **10:28-29**
- Makes salvation a result of works

2. **Unproductive works** of a true believer

- a. These branches are deadwood—unfruitful works
- b. They will be destroyed in judgment—and get no reward
- c. Support for this interpretation

I Cor 3:13-15—*Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

- d. Problem with this interpretation
 - Jesus identifies the 'branch' with people (disciples)
 - These branches do not seem to be just their works—but people themselves

3. **Apparent disciples** who are **false**—not true followers

- a. Support for this interpretation—in John's Gospel
 - Contrast: true disciples have been cleaned by His word—**verse 3**
 - But Jesus said not *all* had been cleaned—**13:10-11**
 - Referring to Judas—who betrayed Him
- b. Other passages say false disciples will be purged—[not just pruned/cleaned]

1. **Mt 13:40-42**—parable of the **tares**

Angels will gather tares and throw them into furnace

2. **Mt 13:49-50**—parable of the **dragnet** and fishes

Angels separate wicked from righteous and throw them into furnace

4. Conclusion

- a. **Verse 2** is *indirectly* about false disciples
- b. But this **is not the main point** of this passage
 - It is *not* about salvation—or security of salvation
 - It is about **fruitfulness**
 - Question: Are we fruitful or unfruitful branches?

Example of unfruitful vines: Kudzu

2. **Productive** branches

- a. What happens to them?
 - 1. The Father Vinedresser prunes productive branches
 - 2. Purpose: to make them *more* productive
- b. **Emphasis** on **fruit-bearing**—mentioned **three times** in **verse 2**

c. **Progression**—not static—but *growing*

- No fruit—v 2
- Fruit—v 2
- More fruit—v 2
- Much fruit—v 5

c. How does Father Vinedresser do this?

1. **Verse 3**—by the **Word** of God [through Christ]—the **Logos**

2. What this means

a. We are **sanctified** by His Word of truth—**Jn 17:17**

b. We are **cleansed** by washing with the Word—**Eph 5:26**

c. His Word **prunes** us

Heb 4:12—*For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

d. **Why** He does this—to make us more **productive**

Example—pruning a grape vine

1st year

- Allow plant to grow many stems—no pruning
- Winter—stake only **one**—the strongest stem—cut others away

2nd year

- Spring—remove all but **two** best side shoots
- Summer—remove all new branches
- Winter—cut back all extra side branches—but these **two**

3rd year

- Growing season—allow only main shoots to grow
- Winter—leave **12 buds** on each branch
 - Prune all other buds
 - These 12 buds are the ‘renewal buds’
 - They will produce fruit in 4th season

4th year—and afterward

- Prune renewal buds
- Allow each to grow only one length each new year

e. Practical **application**

1. God prunes us only when we are productive

- Convicts us of wrong-doing—cuts away the bad
- Stops diffused activity—whatever drains us
- Causes us to focus on a few good things—to do them better

2. If God is *not* pruning us—it is because we are *not* productive

III. PRODUCING FRUIT—VERSES 4-7

A. STRUCTURE OF SECTION

- Verse 4—principle—**abiding** in the Vine produces fruit
- Verse 5—specific **application** of principle
- Verse 6—expanded **warning**
- Verse 7—expanded **promise**

B. VERSE 4—ABIDING IN CHRIST

1. Continues a theme of **chapter 14**—‘abiding’
 - **14:10-11**—Father and Son abide in each other
 - **Chapter 15**—*we* abide in the *Son*
2. Structure of verse
 - **Command**—abide in me!
 - Implied **promise**—and I will abide in you
 - General **warning**—no fruit-bearing without abiding in vine
3. Main point: **key to producing fruit = abide** in Me—the True Vine

C. VERSE 5—SPECIFIC APPLICATION

1. **Structure** of verse—re-focuses on **Christ**
 - Specific explanation: *I* am the vine and you are the branches
 - Specific promise—whoever abides in *me* bears much fruit
 - Specific warning—apart from *me* you can do nothing
2. Reminder of **roles and functions** in the Kingdom of God
 - a. Remember who is who—*I* am the vine; *you* are the branches
 - b. Remember what you can and cannot do!
 - You can do *absolutely* nothing without me!
 - Your work is useless without me!
 - c. This was true even of Jesus Himself
 - He said the Son can do *nothing* without the Father—**5:19**
 - d. Likewise—now He does most things *through us*—His branches!
 - Implication—without our work—there will be no fruit!

D. VERSE 6—EXPANDED WARNING

1. Warning—whoever **does not abide** in me is discarded and **destroyed**
2. Reason:

Dry vines burning in Kidron Valley—are good for nothing

Unlike olive trees—wood can be cut, carved, shaped, and used

3. **Basis for condemnation**—important point!!!

- a. Condemned for **not abiding**—*not* for lack of fruit-bearing
- b. Condemnation is **not based on works**—but on lack of relationship
- c. **BUT** lack of works is a *result* of no relationship—disconnected from Vine

E. **VERSE 7**—EXPANDED PROMISE—BEYOND ABIDING IN CHRIST

1. Importance of ‘abiding’

- Abide—here—used **11 times** in these 11 verses
- Abide—in John—used **40 times** in Gospel—**27 times** in John’s letters

2. Continues theme of Bread of Life

- When we **digest** Christ—He **abides** with us—**Jn 6:55-56**

For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

3. Continues a theme of **Chapter 14**—Father and Son **abiding** together

4. Two part conditional promise

a. The **two conditions**—of the promise

- If you abide in me
- And if my words abide in you

b. **Promise**: ask what you will— and it will be done—repeats **14:13-14**

- Promised also in Synoptics—Mk 11:24 and Mt 21:22
- Echoed in I Jn 5:14-15

IV. **GOD’S PURPOSES IN THE VINEYARD—VERSES 8-11**

A. **FIRST PURPOSE**—GLORIFY THE FATHER—**v 8**

1. How the Father is glorified—‘by this’

a. It points **backward**—the Father is glorified by Jesus answering prayer (**v 7**)

14:13—Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

b. It also points **forward**

1. The Father is glorified by two more things—**verse 8**

- By our **fruit-bearing** (v 8)
- By our being **true disciples**—[explained further in vv 9-11]

2. **Interim** goal here—*proving* we are **Christ's disciples**

- We do not glorify Him by just any kind of works
- Only *genuine* fruit glorifies Him
- This fruit can be produced only by Christ's true disciples
- So *genuine* fruit-bearing proves we are *true* disciples

3. **Ultimate** goal—**glorify Father**—obey Jesus and He glorifies the Father [**17:10** and **21:19**]

B. SECOND PURPOSE—WE WILL EXPERIENCE HIS JOY—verses 9-11

1. **VERSES 9-10**—This section shows *how* to abide in Christ

a. Overall patterns—of love and obedience

- Father's love—sets pattern for the Son's love
- Son's obedience—sets pattern for disciples' obedience
- Important thing—remaining in His love—said 3 times

b. **Verses 9a and 10b**—tell us **how** to abide

1. The power to abide—is love

2. The divine example

- 9a—The Father loves the Son
- 10b—The Son abides in the Father's love [**see 14:10**]
- 10b—By keeping His Father's commandments

c. **Verses 9b and 10a**—command and application

- 9b—Command = abide in My love!
- 10a—Application—*how* to abide
 - Keep my commandments
 - Then you will abide in my love

d. The **full circle** of divine love

1. God loves the Son—the Son loves the Father
2. The Son loves His disciples—so disciples love the Son—by obeying Him
3. Loving the Son—means to love the Father—and to be loved by the Father
4. God loves the world—gave His Son for salvation of the world
5. So His disciples should also love others—and give themselves for their salvation

2. **VERSE 11**—**Second purpose completed**—our joy will be full

a. Jesus' joy will become ours

b. Jesus' joy—was in three things

- In **bearing fruit**—as the True Vine
- In **obeying the Father**—thus glorifying the Father
- In **abiding** in the Father's love

c. But—remember what fullness of Jesus' joy means

1. He said this while confronting the cross

Heb 12:2—*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the **JOY** set before Him endured the **CROSS**, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*

2. The challenge to us—as *we* take up *our* cross!

- Joy—even when encountering many trials—**James 1:2**
- Joy—even in every circumstance—**Phil 4**

FINAL QUESTION

What *are* the marks of a true disciple of Christ?

ANSWER

1. We **produce** fruit

- Outward—tell the Good News—plant seeds
- Outward—bring in the harvest of believers
- Inward—grow in holiness and obedience
- Inward—bear the fruit of the spirit

2. We are being **pruned**—if not—then we are not useful to God

3. We **pray**—expecting our prayers to be answered

4. We **obey** Christ—and abide in His love

5. We **love** other believers—we obey His commandment—see **v 12**

6. We **experience** His **joy**—in all circumstances—as we take up our cross