

## 140. The Gospel of John—15:1-2

*“The Vine and the Branches” Part 1*

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John 15:1, 4-5 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...<sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Here in John 15, we have one of the classic passages in the New Testament on the purpose and importance of fruit-bearing in the Christian life.

In this section Jesus uses one of His many illustrations taken from something they knew very well—agriculture. And in particular—the cultivation and care of grape vines to communicate one of the most important lessons He ever taught on the *essential* relationship between Himself and His disciples.

Since the whole goal of agriculture is to bear fruit, something the disciples understood only too well, He uses this illustration to drive home the importance of bearing fruit in our relationship with Him—which other passages in the New Testament tell is the whole goal of the Christian life.

Fruit-bearing is such an important part of the Christian life—that Jesus goes as far as to say that the only way we even know that we are one of His disciples (saved) is that we bear fruit.

When Jesus said, **“I am the vine”** in verses 1 and 5—that phrase, spoken just hours before His death—was the last of the “7 ‘I AM’ statements” in John’s Gospel.

John’s Gospel is highly organized—he built it around 7 ‘I AM’ statements.

Each of these “I AM” statements is a declaration of divinity since they each begin with Jesus declaring Himself to be the ‘Great I AM’ in human form—which is the theme of John’s entire Gospel (John 20:30-31).

The phrase “I AM” as the name of God was first expressed in the book of Exodus 3:13-14.

The word is actually a verb meaning *“to be”* or *“to become”*—the idea being that God wants *to be* or *to become* to us whatever we need—which is why the word ‘Jehovah’ (“I AM”) is often coupled with a noun.

- “Jehovah-Shalom” (‘I Am-Peace’)
- “Jehovah-Jireh” (‘I Am-Provision’)
- “Jehovah-Nissi” (‘I Am-Victory’)
- “Jehovah-Rohi” (‘I Am-Shepherd’)

But the greatest of all is:

- “Jehovah-Shua” (“I Am-Salvation”).

The Greek name “Jesus” comes from Jehovah-Shua—“Yahoshua” or “Y’shua” for short.

God wants to become to us whatever we need—well, our greatest need was for salvation.

So, God the Second Person of the Trinity, came down from heaven, became a Man and died in our place in the Person of Jesus—our Y’shua (“the Lord has become our salvation”).

In John’s Gospel Jesus called Himself “I AM” (name of God) coupled with 7 different nouns expressing what He desires to become to people (starting with the desire to be their Savior as expressed in His very name).

1. *“I Am—the Bread of Life” (John 6:35)*
2. *“I Am—the Light of the World” (John 8:12)*
3. *“I Am—the Door” (John 10:9)*
4. *“I Am—the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11)*
5. *“I Am—the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11:25)*
6. *“I Am—the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6)*
7. *“I Am—the Vine” (John 15:1, 5)*

Each of these statements is a declaration of divinity—affirming that Jesus Himself is the Great I AM in human form—

**John 1:1, 14 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Now, before we look at Jesus’ illustration of the vine and the branches—let’s set the scene.

The evening began in John 13 in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem where Jesus and the twelve Apostles/disciples observed the Passover together. During the meal Judas Iscariot left to carry out his betrayal of Christ.

After Judas left the room Jesus instituted communion and then began to give His disciples one final teaching before His crucifixion to comfort and prepare them for what was coming the next day. At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter Jesus said to the eleven remaining disciples—**“Arise, let us go from here” (verse 31).**

At that point, Jesus and the disciples left the upper room and began making their way through the streets of Jerusalem toward the Eastern Gate. The Eastern Gate (also known as the ‘Golden Gate’) was the gate through which they needed to exit the city to make their way to the Mount of Olives—and ultimately to the Garden of Gethsemane which was located on that mount.

Jesus knew the owner of that garden very well—so well in fact that he gave Jesus a key to the gate of the garden so that He could enter it anytime He wanted. In fact, He would often retreat there after a long day of ministry in Jerusalem to spend time with His Father in prayer—sometimes praying all night!

This night would once again find Him spending time in prayer in that very garden—the only difference being that—this would be the *last* night He would be spending time in that garden praying. You see, on this night after spending several hours praying to His Father—He would be arrested and taken first to the home of Annas—the official Jewish High Priest.

There at Annas' house He would undergo the first of 2 mock trials.

- The first being *religious* as He would stand before the High Priest and members of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish High Counsel) and be accused of *blasphemy*.
- The second trial would be a *civil* trial before Pontius Pilate—the Roman governor of the region where Jesus had been accused of being an *insurrectionist*.

Both of these trials together would take no longer than six hours total resulting in Jesus hanging on the cross by 9 o'clock in the morning. So, with that as background, John 15 is a continuation of the discourse Jesus began in the upper room as recorded in Chapters 13 and 14.

As I said, they were now on the move, enroute from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane.

It being Passover time, they would have been traveling under the light of a full moon (Passover always takes place during the full moon) and the path they would have walked that night would have taken them through the Temple precincts.

As I said, they would have then exited the Temple area and the city of Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate—also, known as the Golden Gate, on their way to the Mount of Olives where the Garden of Gethsemane was located.

The gates of the city were always left open at night during Passover season (to accommodate traveling pilgrims)—these particular gates (*Eastern* aka. *Golden* gates) were something of a tourist attraction. They had been forged in Greece, sailed across the Aegean Sea and then brought to Jerusalem, and placed in Herod's temple (not the LORD's Temple, He had left long ago—Ezekiel 10).

The gates were made of bronze—but looked like 'gold' in the sun which is why they were referred to as the 'golden' gates. The important thing for you to understand which is germane to this whole teaching that Jesus is about to give is that—carved into these golden gates was a grape vine—a vine which represented the nation of Israel.

It is possible (I think probable) that upon seeing those gates and the vine engraved into them that Jesus could have stopped and in the light of the full moon used the occasion to teach His disciples this incredible spiritual lesson using the illustration of the vine and the branches.

Up until this point the illustration of a fruitful vine was how God had wanted to portray the nation of Israel—

**Psalm 80:8-9 (NLT2)**

<sup>8</sup> You brought us from Egypt like a grapevine; you drove away the pagan nations and transplanted us into your land. <sup>9</sup> You cleared the ground for us, and we took root and filled the land.

**Isaiah 5:7 (NLT2)**

<sup>7</sup> The nation of Israel is the vineyard of the LORD of Heaven's Armies. The people of Judah are his pleasant garden. He expected a crop of justice, but instead he found oppression. He expected to find righteousness, but instead he heard cries of violence.

Israel failed to bear the fruit of righteousness so now God has turned that responsibility over to His Church, which is why Jesus said to His disciples—*"I am the vine and you are the branches...and it is the Father's will that you produce much fruit."*

Before we can glean everything Jesus wanted to communicate to us from this illustration, we first need to understand exactly what He is saying here—since this is a very controversial section of Scripture. Many believe that Jesus is teaching here that Christians can lose their salvation if they don't live righteously ('bear fruit') or if they backslide and stop producing fruit they will be "*pruned*" by the Father—in other words, separated from Christ and sent to hell.

But, in light of all that Jesus has taught up until this point in John's Gospel concerning the absolute, eternal security of the believer in Christ—I thoroughly reject that interpretation:

**John 6:37 (NKJV)**

<sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

**John 6:39 (NKJV)**

<sup>39</sup> This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

**John 10:27-28 (NKJV)**

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Let's try to put ourselves in Jesus' sandals that night before His crucifixion and try to understand what was weighing most heavily on His heart and mind as He was just hours away from the cross—because none of His teachings were devoid of context.

- We know that the **Father** was on His mind because He had talked quite a bit about His relationship with His Heavenly Father earlier in the evening and how He would soon be going back to the Father.
- We know that the **eleven disciples** were weighing heavy on His heart that night because He had spent the better part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter comforting them.
- We also know that He was thinking about **Judas** on that night.

Earlier in the upper room as He washed the disciple's feet He said—

**John 13:10-11 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> ...**"He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."** <sup>11</sup> **For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."**

The thought that one of those disciples who had *appeared* to be connected to Him for the last

3 ½ years (saved) but was only '*superficially*' connected to Him (not saved)—was definitely on His mind.

- Therefore, on that night Jesus was thinking about the Father, whom He loved and who loved Him in return—whom He would soon be returning back to.
- He was also thinking about the eleven disciples who He loved and who loved Him back—those who were genuine and truly connected to Him by saving faith.
- And He was also thinking about Judas whom He loved but who didn't love Him in return, who was a *phony* disciple, a *deceiver*—and was not really connected to Him by saving faith.

Now, that I believe forms the background for this all-important teaching. I believe that all of this was on the mind of Jesus that night as He led His disciples through the Temple area on their way to the Mount of Olives.

As they came to the Golden Gate that led out of the city and seeing the grape vine carvings in the light of the moon—that this became the impetus for giving them this discourse using the illustration of the vine and the branches.

It shouldn't surprise us then that this illustration would contain references to *all* of the people on Jesus' heart that night and their relationship to Him which He then weaves into this illustration.

- **Jesus Christ** is the 'true vine'—verse 1
- **The Father** is the 'vinedresser'—verse 1
- **The eleven true disciples** are the branches that bear fruit or what some have called '*Jesus branches*'—verses 2, 5
- **Judas**, and all who are like him, are referred to as the branches that don't bear fruit or what some have called '*Judas branches*'—i.e. phony or counterfeit disciples. People who look genuine but are only *superficially* attached to Jesus Christ—verses 2, 6

#### I. Jesus Christ Is The 'True Vine'—verse 1a

As we have already pointed out—in the Old Testament, Israel had been referred to as "*a vine planted, tended, and pruned by God.*"

But Israel had become unproductive in producing the fruits of righteousness.

#### **Hosea 10:1 (HCSB)**

<sup>1</sup> Israel is a lush vine; it yields fruit for itself. The more his fruit increased, the more he increased the altars [to pagan gods]. The better his land produced, the better they made the sacred pillars [to idols].

#### **Jeremiah 2:21 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?

Jesus had Himself indicted the nation for this very thing in the parable He gave in Matthew 21:33–43.

He indicted the Jewish people for not bearing the fruits of righteousness but instead how they had killed the prophets God sent to them telling them to repent of their idolatry—and would now be guilty of murdering God’s final Messenger to the nation—His own dear Son!

Now, with the Old Testament order/economy ending and the New Covenant having just been installed or inaugurated at the Last Supper (Communion)—Jesus states clearly that He is the **“true vine” (verse 1)**. By saying this Jesus Christ is likening the whole human race to *branches* and Himself to the only *True Vine* and is saying to people everywhere—**“I alone am the source of life, nourishment, fruitfulness and fulfillment!”**

So many have attached themselves to “*vines*” other than Christ as a source of life and fulfillment—money, education, sex, fame, political power, social connections, business success, and religious affiliations—are just some of the many “*vines*” that people have attached themselves to looking for happiness and fulfillment.

But only Jesus is the **“True Vine”**—the source and the sustainer of eternal life.

This life only flows from Him (John 1:4) into and through those who are connected to Him by saving faith.

## II. The Father Is The ‘Vinedresser’—verse 1b

Jesus likened the Father to the *vinedresser*.

In the first century, a vinedresser would have two duties:

- **First**, he would cut off the branches that weren’t bearing fruit, branches that were sapping energy so as to allow more life to flow to the branches that were bearing fruit so that they could produce more and larger fruit.
- **Second**, he would prune the branches that did bear fruit, cutting off the little ‘*sucker shoots*’ that would grow up from the branch and would sap away energy and thereby diminish its fruit bearing capacity.

This was done so that each branch would bring forth the most fruit possible. That’s what the Father desires from our lives as well (verse 2 and verse 8), that we bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit.

## III. Judas Branches—verse 2a, 6

**John 15:2 (NKJV)**

<sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...

**John 15:6 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

Let’s stop and consider the words of Jesus carefully when He said—

- **“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...”**

Don’t let the phrase **“in Me”** bother you—I don’t believe Jesus is speaking *literally* of those people who are truly saved—but in a *figurative* sense. In other words, I believe what the Lord is really saying is that certain ‘branches’—“appear to be ‘in Me’” (just like Judas appeared to be ‘in Me’—i.e., ‘genuine’).”

All the superficial ‘*Judas branches*’ are someday going to be dealt with by God—judged, as verse 6 tells us:

**John 15:6 (NKJV)**

**<sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.**

Compare that with what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount—

**Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

**Matthew 13:24-30 (NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; <sup>25</sup> but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. <sup>26</sup> But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. <sup>27</sup> So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' <sup>28</sup> He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' <sup>29</sup> But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' "

And that then brings us to the heart of the passage—the “**Jesus branches.**”

**IV. The Jesus Branches—verse 2b**

**John 15:2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**

These we will look at next week as we look at how the Father prunes our lives that we might bear the most fruit possible for His glory. We’ll define what the fruit is that the Father is looking for from our lives as Christians.

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