

## **Abide in Me: The True Vine**

John 15:1

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This morning, I'll ask if you could turn your Bibles to John chapter number 15. The Gospel according to John chapter number 15, and I'd like us to consider reading verse 1 through to verse number 8. Gospel of John chapter 15, verse number 1: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. 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. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." May the Lord add His blessing to His most holy word. Amen.

I want us to consider, in the next following weeks, a very important analogy given by our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples at a very important time in the life of the disciples. The setting at which this occasion, this analogy had occasioned, was a time where Christ was on His way to Gethsemane, where He would be arrested, tried, and crucified. And it is there, on His way to Gethsemane, that He unfolds to His disciples this most precious analogy that has served the people of God for many, many generations and has encouraged, strengthened, and helped them. And it is my prayer that it would do the same for us as we consider it.

In John chapter number 13, we are in the upper room with Jesus, and Jesus is washing His disciples' feet. And there, as He washes His disciples' feet, including Judas's feet, they go to break bread together. As they have that last supper together, which we just remembered only a moment ago, and there, as they break the bread and they drink the cup, Jesus reminds His disciples that one of you will betray Me. And the disciples were confused and confounded as to who it was that would betray Him. Some said, "Is it me? Is it I?" And Jesus basically said, "The one that I, when I dip the

bread into the shop and I pass it to him, this is the one who betrayed Me." And at that moment, Jesus dipped the bread and passed it to Judas, and Judas, the Bible says, went out from their presence immediately.

And following Judas leaving the presence of Jesus and His disciples, the upper end of chapter 13 goes on to say, "And then Jesus said to His disciples," and what we have from the end of chapter 13 all the way through to chapter 17 is unbroken, or what seems to be at least according to the Gospel of John, an unbroken discourse of Jesus teaching His disciples very important truth that they needed to understand and comprehend as He was about to leave them. You know that John chapter 14, "Do not let your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. I am the way, the truth, and the life." In chapter 14, He expounds to them the importance of the coming of the Holy Spirit, "That I'm going, but He is coming, one who is called another Comforter." In chapter 16, He also elaborates on that. In the end of chapter 15, He talks about His suffering and the suffering that they will bear also as followers of Himself. And in chapter 17, we have Him there in the garden of Gethsemane, most likely pouring out His heart unto God with intercession for those people that He had just taught just moments ago.

And it is important to understand that this discourse is one of the greatest discourses that have ever been unfolded. And in most of the Gospels, apart from John, there's just a little section that moves from the upper room to the betrayal to the arrest, and we don't get this information. But John records it here for us, for our learning. And in chapter number 15, verses 1 through to verse number 8, Jesus takes the time to unfold and to teach His disciples of an analogy. And the analogy that He gives is one of a vine and its branches. And the vine, in this analogy, is Christ, the vine, the true vine, and He is at the center of this analogy. It is the vine in the parable, or in the analogy, that gives life to the branches, sustains the branches, and who gives sustenance to the branches so that the branches can bear fruit. The branches, the disciples of Jesus Christ, those that follow Jesus, of which the Bible teaches there are two kinds: those that bear fruit and those that do not bear fruit.

Also, in this analogy, we have a vinedresser, who is the gardener, who is God the Father, and He is the one who prunes and cares for the vine and its branches. The vine and the vinedresser, in the analogy, are the cause for the branches' fruit. The branch does not bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, and it is the husbandman that prunes the vine and prunes the branches so that the branches may bear more fruit. So, the analogy is very clear that it is the cause of the work of God the Father and God the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit, that produces the fruit that hangs off the branches.

Also, what this analogy teaches us is that the branches, the branches that abide truly in the vine, are the ones that bear fruit. They are the ones that share in the union and fellowship and communion of the vine with the branch, and so forth. Now, what we see here, that although there are two types of branches, one branch bears fruit, one doesn't bear fruit, the passage indicates to us that the branches that do not bear fruit are cut off and burned and they're destroyed. That's in verse number two of the analogy: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away," that's the Father, the vinedresser, "and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bring forth more fruit." Verse 6: "Anyone who does not abide in Me is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burnt."

Now, a question that has baffled many people, and most obviously a difficult question, is how can one who is in the vine, in Christ, in the vine, belonging to the vine, be cut off and be burned? This is a problem that has troubled many people over the years, a question that many have had, especially if the vine here is representative of Christ. Well, I think in this analogy, we must be careful not to take too much of what Paul is saying about being in Christ and applying it here in what John is saying here in this passage of Scripture. That is, that there is a difference between being in the vine and abiding in the vine. And first, we have to make that distinction. You see, in verse number two, He says, "Every branch in Me that bears not fruit He takes away," but the branches that bear fruit, they are not the ones that are merely in Him; they are the ones that are abiding in Him. And this is something that comes clear to us, especially as we look at verse number eight, which is the controlling idea so as to understand this problem.

Verse number eight says this: "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." Listen to these words: "So you will be My disciples." Now, the ESV translates that in such a way it gives it more clarity when it says this: "So you will prove to be My disciples." And what the passage is teaching us here is that He is distinguishing the difference between those that prove to be true disciples of Jesus Christ and those who prove not to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. And the idea is that there were many disciples in the time of Jesus that followed Him, Judas being a common example of this, who were, as one sense we could say, superficially joined to the vine. He was there in the presence of the Lord, he listened to the Lord, he obeyed the Lord, he did things for the Lord, if we could say that. He was there amongst the disciples of Jesus. He was there at the table. He was there, seeing the miracles, doing perhaps the miracles in his very self also, but he was not truly a disciple of Jesus Christ.

John 6 brings this out, many other passages in this, and I think this is what helps us understand is that this passage is about what proves us to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. What is the distinguishing mark of those that truly belong to Him? Let us never forget the context in which this passage is given. Judas has just left the company of the disciples to go and betray his Lord, and it is in that context that Jesus says to the rest, Judas not included, that "Now you are already clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." And it is there to show us, as does the rest of the New Testament show us, that there are many who follow Jesus that are not truly of Jesus. As John 8:31 says, "Jesus said, 'If you continue in My word, or if you abide in My word, then are you truly My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'"

Remember in John chapter 13, when Jesus was washing the disciples' feet, He said these very words in verse 10 of chapter 13, "He said, 'You are clean,'" talking to all the disciples, "but He says this, 'but not all of you.'" And so Judas was there, having his feet washed, but he was not truly cleansed by the power of his new life and of a saving grace. The Bible teaches us very clearly that there will be tares who are among the wheat. Jude calls them spots in your love feasts. In fact, the same Apostle here writes in his epistle that there were some that were of us, that they were with us but not of us, because if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they now have been manifested that they were not truly of us at all because they have not continued with us. And I believe these are the very things that Jesus is trying to teach His disciples and showing that relationship of fruitbearing to being a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

And I want us to draw attention to verse number one as we now consider this passage of scripture. And in verse number one, I want us to look at the idea of Christ being the true vine. In John 15:1, the Bible says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." Now, the vine had more than just agricultural significance, although the vine was very significant to the people of that day, and they handled vines regularly and saw vines. Jesus was not just using that so to show them, to make it for them easier to understand, although that was part of it. When Jesus prefaces His remark that He is the true vine, Jesus is drawing upon an Old Testament significance and a typological significance as to the Old Testament vine, and that vine was Israel.

Repeatedly in the Old Testament, Israel is symbolized as a vine. As was read to us this morning, that Israel was the vineyard of the Lord, the vine of the Lord that had basically been destroyed by her enemies, and the cry to for restoration for God's people in Isaiah 5, the same thing, the vineyard of the Lord, the vineyard of the Lord. And there goes on to say, "Look at my beloved vineyard," God said, "I planted this vineyard. I came to her,

and I came to eat her fruit, but her fruit was only but sour grapes." Ezekiel 15, the Lord also says, "How what should I liken Israel but unto a vineyard?" And, "I can't use her for wood because the vine doesn't do much good for wood, and there's no fruit that's hanging off the vine that I can, that I can, that I can have." And He just speaks of the judgment that is to come for her. Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 21, the Lord says, "I planted you as a noble vine. How then have you turned before Me into a degenerate plant?"

And so, what's important to realize is that this common symbolism had more than just the agricultural significance, but it had a significance that regarded and that points back to the Old Testament, which the disciples would have understood, and also the people of that day. The idea of Israel being symbolized as a vine is so common that on the precinct of the temple, at the door, Josephus records for us that there was a vine that hanged down at the precinct of the temple, which was a picture of the nation of Israel, and this was their place of worship. Also, during the Maccabean period that stretches from the end of Malachi to the New Testament, the Maccabeans, they had stamped on their coins pictures of a vine, and they were a priestly family of the Jewish order.

And so, what is very clear to the people of that day and also to the New Testament, clear in the New Testament text, is that Israel was God's vine. And so, when Christ here begins by saying these words, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman," what does He mean by the idea of being the true vine? Well, the Old Testament vine of Israel, as we had looked at previously, had been a degenerate vine. God had planted her, and she had degenerated. And basically, what the Bible is teaching here is that what Israel failed to do, Christ is the true vine that Israel failed to be to Yahweh, to the Lord. And this is common throughout all the typological figures of Israel. In Hosea chapter number 10, verse number 1, the Bible teaches, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," as a reference to Israel. But in the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 2, verse 15, this is applied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ: "Out of Egypt have I called my son," the true son, the son of His love, that did not fail to be and live up to His sonship.

Also, the nation of Israel is known as the seed of Abraham and the children of Abraham, but in Galatians 3:16, the Bible says that the promise was not unto seeds, as of many, but as unto thy seed, which is Christ. Israel is known as the servant of Yahweh in the prophets, and in Isaiah particularly, but in Isaiah chapter 42 on to chapter 53, we have four servant songs of the servant of Yahweh, referring to Messiah, who will come and be a light to the Gentiles, who will come and suffer, that suffering servant of the Lord, which, quite sadly, Israelites today believe that's referring to them, not to Messiah, Isaiah 53.

And so, in the passage of scripture, when we hear the idea of the true vine, what we mean by true is that which is contrasted to that which either failed or was not substantially all that it was meant to be, that which was in one sense fictitious, or that which in one sense did not live up to and fulfill that which it was called to. And this can be said of the temple, this can be said of the priesthood, this can be said of many of the types and figures of the Old Testament. In fact, John himself records three times where the word true is prefaced, referring to Christ. If you remember in John chapter number six, as Jesus is speaking about the bread which came down from heaven, which the manna your fathers ate in the wilderness and they perished, what did Jesus say? "I am the true bread which comes down from heaven, which gives His life for the world." And they realized that that which they were eating was not, but the fathers ate in the wilderness was not as, if I could say, great and precious and the fulfillment of all that it represented. Jesus was the true bread that came down from heaven, and He gave His life and gave eternal life, that if they eat from Him, they shall live forever.

He's also said in John chapter 1, verse 9, that He's the true light that lights every man that comes into the world. And if you read carefully the Old Testament, Israel was meant to be a light to the nations, a light to the Gentiles, which she failed to do. And here John is saying, here is the true light that does not fail to shine. Here is the true light that has shined the light of His glory to Jew and Gentile, to all men everywhere. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ has come and appeared to them. The Bible teaches that He will be a light to the Gentiles and also to His people Israel. And here in this passage, He is not only the true bread, the true light, but the true vine. And by saying that He is the true vine, what that simply means is what Israel failed to be as a vine in giving fruit unto God that He desired, Christ does perfectly. He does not fail at doing that which Israel had failed to do.

And so then, how then should we as God's people view this vine? What we should view this vine as the center of all God's purposes and plans. You see, the vinedresser has one vine, and the redemption of God and the blessings of God are found in harmony and relationship with the true vine, with the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, we also understand that the special care of the vinedresser also applies to the vine and its branches. And also, what we realize is that as every vinedresser or gardener who plants trees in his garden comes to eat the fruit of his tree, what we can also realize here from this text of scripture is that the fruits that come from Christ's vine truly satisfy the Father. It is all that the Father intended it to be because the vine is infallibly perfect and does not fail at doing that which the Father had purposed for Him to do. Therefore, to be united with this vine is to be at the center of all God's saving purposes.

Therefore, for us as God's people to be united to this vine means that we have the care of that vinedresser. Also, what it means is to be united to this vine means that we inherit and enjoy all the blessings of God, and the fruit that comes from our life through the work of the Son of God pleases God. He tastes for that fruit and glories in that which comes from His new creation. This is of great comfort to us. This ought to be of great assurance to us, that to think about in all the purposes of God, Christ, the centerpiece of all that has come into the world, and we as the branches can be grafted in and a part of that very vine, the Lord Jesus Himself. To know that we are at the center of God's work and saving purposes in and through His Son, Jesus Christ, ought to be the way that we view the beauty of this vine.

What we wanted to realize also is that this vine is a true vine and a supreme vine above all other vines. Not only is it at the center of God's purposes, but what it means for us also is that He is called true, and because Christ is called the true vine, therefore, He is worthy of our confidence and worthy of our attention. Simply what I'm trying to say by this is that all other vines will not avail. The fact that Christ is the true vine means that every other vine cannot fulfill and live up to bearing true fruit unto God. When we consider the other vines, if we could say, in this world, whether it's the vine of the law, where is the vine of moralism, or the vine of our own self-confidence, where is the vine of Christian nationalism, or worldly philosophy, or worldly ways, those vines will not produce fruit unto God the vinedresser that He will be pleased with.

And so, Christ here is the true vine, as opposed to other false vines and vines that cannot live up to that which God has as desired for His people. And so here, as God's people, we have a firm foundation that if I am united to this vine, I am safe. If I am united to this vine, I am in the center of God's purposes and joined to Him that is true and not joined to that which is false. But also, what we have here is Christ as the unfailing vine. If He is the true vine, in the sense that He fulfilled and lived up to all that Israel failed to do, what we realize then by this is that He will not fail ever in being all that God has desired for Him to be. He's the servant that will fulfill the law of God perfectly. He is the one who has been given a mission that He will not fail at. He is the one that if we are joined to Him, and it's through Him that we bear fruit, that we will most assuredly bear fruit unto God if we are united to Him.

The roots of this vine run deep into the life of God. The roots of this vine have a constant flow of nutrients. It is the roots of this vine that impart to us a never-ending life. It is the roots of this vine that will not wither, and whatsoever He does shall prosper. It is the roots of this vine that spreads His branches not to a particular locality, like a nation or a people group

only, but spreads His branches and the vine spreads throughout all the earth, that all who believe on Him may be joined unto Him in true and living faith. He is the unfailing vine, and He has fulfilled all that God has intended perfectly.

And dear people, if we are to take confidence in this, this is the vine of God's new covenant. This is the vine of God's new covenant, and all those who are truly joined to that vine, as the Word of God teaches, they shall know the Lord. The law of God shall be written in their hearts, and they shall bear fruit unto God because they are united to Him who is true and unfailing in His work of sanctifying and saving. If He is truly the center of all God's purposes, if He truly is the supreme and true vine, if He really is the unfailing vine, how then should we think of Him? Should not we think of Christ then as one who is all in all to us? Shouldn't we look upon this vine and therefore be satisfied because we have in Him everything?

You see, the people of God, when the disciples of Jesus that were following Him, and I say that word disciples generically as the Bible uses it, in John chapter 6, Jesus began to say unto them many hard sayings, and the Bible teaches us that many of His disciples no longer walked with Him. And Jesus then looks at His 12, and He says to the 12, He says, "Will you also go away?" And Peter, perking up and with the passion and conviction in his heart, he said something that was very true. He said to whom shall we go, but we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We believe this. Peter, at that very moment, was confessing the true vine. He was saying, "Where else are we going to go? Who else can give us eternal life? Who else is our Savior? Who else is the true Messiah? Who else is the one that fulfills all God's purposes perfectly? You are the Christ. You are the Son. You are the one who is everything to us."

My dear friends, can you say that today? Do you really believe with all your heart that all the other vines will fail to bear true righteousness in your life? Do we really believe today, dear people of God, that the only way that we can bear fruit unto God, the only way that we can enjoy and know true union with the Son and with the Father and with the Spirit, is through Jesus Christ? You see, many of God's people feel that if they join themselves to externalism, then they'll bear fruit unto God. They think if they join themselves to legalism, then they will truly bear fruit unto God. They think if they join themselves to superstition or religiosity or certain self-indulgences, then they can have true things in their lives.

How many people think to themselves today, even believers, quite sadly, sometimes lose sight of the trueness and the sufficiency of the vine of God, Jesus Christ? How many people think to themselves, "The way out of this situation, to bear this fruit in my life, if I'm struggling with this in my life,



the way to bear this fruit in my life, the good fruit of righteousness, is me time. If I have me time, I'll be more holy. If I just went on a holiday, maybe I'll be able to break that bad habit in my life." How many people think that if I just implement these strategies and simply come to my issue in my life with sheer discipline alone, then I can break those sins that are tying me down and that I'm struggling with, then I'll bear fruit truly unto God?

My dear friends, the Bible teaches us that the only way that we'll bear fruit unto God is if we are joined to Christ in true abiding union of faith. That every other vine will fail. And what the Bible also teaches us, not just from this passage but from other passages, whatever vine we are united with is the fruit that we shall bear. The Bible teaches us very clearly that whatever we are united with will be that which we bear. Can a grape, can a fig tree bring forth thistles? The Bible teaches us, can a good tree bring forth bad fruit? Can a bad tree or evil tree bring forth good fruits? And what is Jesus teaching us here? That which you are united with and that which is yours and that which you truly give your dependence and love to and affections to, and that which you are united with, will represent that which you bear.

If your life is united with anger, with anger you will breed murder. If your life is united to lust, you will bring forth, you will bring forth fornication and all kinds of uncleanness. But if your life is truly united with the vine, and you are abiding in Him as we are so called to do, then you'll bring forth true fruits of righteousness, which the Bible teaches are the works and the fruits of the Spirit, which life through Him comes out then through us.

And so, the question we have to ask ourselves this morning is a solemn question: Are we a branch that truly abides in the vine? You might say in response to that, "I'm joined to Christ, and I'm part of the vine because I believe." I ask you this question then: What is the fruit of your union? You see, the people of God, yes, we are joined to the vine by true faith in Jesus Christ, but let us never forget that faith without works is dead, being alone, and that the devils also believe and tremble. Let us never forget that there are dead, superficial branches that are in the best of vines.

The people of God, let us consider, let us think about Judas, set before us in this text. Judas, the one who was at the table with the Lord, with the disciples, the one who had Jesus wash his feet, the one who was in the company of the fruit-bearing branches. Judas, a dead branch. Judas, a branch that bore no true fruit unto God. Judas, a branch that was not abiding in the vine. The Bible teaches us that he was a son of perdition, and for Judas, it was thirty pieces of silver. And what may it be for some of us? Thirty pieces of silver proved Judas to not be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and the question that we have to ask ourselves: What may it be for

some of us? May it be a hard saying that causes us to be made manifest? May it be a trial or affliction? May it be, maybe, a loss or a bad thing that happens to us? May it be a business deal that goes wrong that leads us into a sort of bankruptcy that causes us to throw our hands in the air and say, "I will no longer follow this Jesus"? What may it be for some of us who profess the Lord? May it be persecution or may it be shame that drives us away from the presence of the Lord, that causes us to leave the company of those that profess Him, and to be made manifest that we truly do not belong to Him?

My dear friends, be sure that your relationship to the vine is not a superficial one, but as the Bible teaches, an abiding one. Be sure that it is a union of true faith, a union whereby you can say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul said, "I am united to Him in His death. I am united to Him in His life, so that the life which I now live is not my own. I live the life that is in me, and I live it through true faith's union."

It is more than just being around God's people. It's more than just feeling the presence of God in the midst of God's people. It is a true inward work of the grace of Jesus Christ that is evident by the fruits that hang from our branches. So let us see to it that we truly abide in Him, and our faith is truly dependent on the vine for fruit-bearing.

Some of us may say, "Well, I am joined to Christ, and I know Him, but my fruit isn't all that I would like it to be." I want you to have confidence this morning, dear people of God, that if you have true faith in God and there are the fruits of righteousness that can testify to your relationship to the vine, take confidence that the work of fruit-bearing, you are not alone in it, but God the Father, the vinedresser, and the vine itself will give life and fruit to you. The fruit is from Him, the fruit is through Him, and the fruit is to Him. And when we look at our lives that seem to be failing so often, realize this, my dear people, if you, brothers and sisters, if you are in the vine, understand this, that you will bear fruit unto God. Just depend on it, depend on Him, lean upon Him, trust in Him, serve Him, give Him your all, because it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

It is not like the fruits are a list of do's and don'ts that you must manufacture and must cultivate and must create. No, if we think that way, we are joined to the vine which is the law, and not to Christ. The fruits of our life come through our union of faith in Jesus Christ. The fruits cannot be manufactured; they are not genetically modified, if I could say. They are

not things that are made by man's ability and powers. They arise through Christ. They have, then, we are pruned by God so that we might bear more fruit unto Christ, through the life of Jesus Christ.

There's a vast difference between being joined to that vine. And so, my friends, my encouragement to us who do know Christ, who do lean upon Him, is to continue to abide in Him. Stop looking elsewhere for true fruit. It will only come as you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and as you rest in Him, depend on Him, yield to Him, and as you let the vinedresser prune back your branches so that you may bear forth more fruit.

Let us pray.