

# I Am the Vine

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M.W. Bassford  
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## Introduction.

- A. During the Biblical era, grapes and wine were one of the major agricultural products of the region of Palestine. As a result, grapes and vineyards appear frequently in the Bible, sometimes literally, sometimes as metaphors to describe Israel's relationship with God. Naturally, grapes and vineyards show up in a lot of sermons, too.
- B. This can be dangerous, particularly when a preacher chooses to use actual grapes to illustrate his point. For instance, when I was real, real little, my parents were worshipping with a church that had a lot of members without a lot of money. One family in particular, a family that sat on the front row, often had trouble even providing food for their little kids.
- C. On this particular Sunday, the preacher had decided to deliver a sermon on the twelve spies and the agricultural bounty they found in the land of Canaan. To illustrate the massive bunch of grapes that the spies had brought back, he'd brought a real bunch of grapes in and stuck it behind the pulpit so that he could produce it at the appropriate time. Unfortunately for the poor preacher, when he held up his visual aid for the congregation, all he had in his hand was a tangle of stems. Before services, the hungry little boy on the front row had snuck up to the pulpit and eaten his bunch of grapes. True story.
- D. For that reason, all the grapes you will see during this lesson will be strictly digital. There will be no snacks for anyone from me, regardless of how hungry you are. However, I trust that the lesson will prove to be both spiritually nourishing and, dare I say, fruitful.
- E. Nor do I think that my confidence is misplaced. This isn't going to be something I came up with. It's going to be something Jesus came up with, and that's because throughout this sermon today, we'll be looking at John 15:1-8. There's a lot here, folks, possibly more than any of us can understand. However, let's spend some time today looking at the words of Jesus, trying to figure out what He meant when He said, "I am the vine."

## I. God's Vineyard.

- A. As we explore this topic, we must start by understanding God's vineyard. This is the background that Jesus gives in John 15:1-3. The first verse sets the stage: Jesus is a vine. However, He's not a wild vine that's left to its own devices. He's a vine that is tended by God.
- B. This implies that God has something He wants from Jesus, and v. 2 makes God's desire explicit. God wants all the branches that Jesus has to bear fruit. Just like any vinedresser, He wants them to produce as much as possible. To that end, He does two things:
  1. First, He removes branches that don't bear fruit. This is something that all vinedressers do. The grapevine doesn't exist for its own purposes, to grow wherever it wants to and be pretty. Instead, the grapevine exists for its owner's purpose, and any part of the grapevine that doesn't serve that purpose gets cut off. It's a waste of resources. In fact, if you leave too many branches on a grapevine, it keeps all the grapes on the vine from ripening properly.
  2. God is the same way. He set up the Lord's church so that it could glorify Him, not so all of its branches could do whatever they wanted. If we aren't producing for God in the way that He wants us to produce, He is going to cut us off too. That way, we're not wasting God's resources, AND we're not preventing others from producing. However, when branches ARE bearing fruit like they're supposed to, God doesn't just leave them alone. He prunes them. Once again, this is exactly like real vinedressers do. People who know anything about grape-growing regard pruning as the most important activity of the grape-growing year. It's an extremely skilled process, and it involves considering each branch individually, figuring out what cuts to make so that the branch produces at its best. This involves a lot more than just snipping around the edges; the appearance of a vine is transformed by a skilled pruner. God considers His people in the same way. He gets rid of anything in our lives that prevents us from performing at our peak.
- C. In v. 3, we learn what God's primary pruning tool is—the word. "Clean" is just another way of saying "pruned;" it refers to all of the useless leaves and twigs being "cleaned" off. When we consider the word, we don't have any trouble seeing how it prunes us. It removes from our lives all the things that would distract us from bearing fruit. Jesus's audience here, the disciples, has already been cleaned in this way.

God has finished this stage of the work. It's time for the apostles to make a decision.

## II. **Abiding in Him.**

- A. Jesus urges his disciples to make this decision by abiding in Him. We see this idea presented in John 15:4. "Abide in Me, and I in you," He commands. This is the key verse of the entire context. It emphasizes our complete dependence on Jesus. No branch of a grapevine has ever borne fruit without being attached to a vine, and we can't bear fruit without being attached to Jesus.
- B. The phrase "Abide in Me, and I in you" is a little confusing, though. It's something we must do if we wish to remain in Christ, but what does it mean? Three things cause us to abide in Him and He in us:
  - 1. Keeping His commandments (1 John 3:24). This tells us that we need to obey the word of the Holy Spirit that is preserved for us in Scripture, and constantly check ourselves against it.
  - 2. Abiding in love (1 John 4:16). We can't just love sometimes and hope to be pleasing to God. We have to stay in love, remain in love, so that an attitude of love shapes everything we do.
  - 3. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:56). At first glance, this verse looks creepy and cannibalistic. At second glance, it looks like it's about the Lord's Supper. Although it does have something to do with the Lord's Supper, neither one of those impressions is completely accurate. Really, this verse is much like the imagery of John 15. It's telling us that we need to be spiritually nourished by Jesus, that we need to sustain ourselves only on Him. That way, our spiritual diet transforms us into His likeness. That's where the Lord's Supper comes in. One of the things we do when we eat the bread and drink the cup is affirm that we are fed only by Him. All of these things are what it means to be in Him, and have Him in us. That's the decision we need to make.

## III. **Fruit or Fire?**

- A. Our decision about abiding in Jesus leads to one of two possible consequences: fruit or fire. Jesus reveals this in John 15:5-6. About the first consequence, Jesus says that those who abide in Him, and He in them, bear much fruit. Two things need to be said about this idea:
  - 1. First, for some reason, when we think about bearing fruit, our minds automatically jump to bringing other people to the Lord. That's certainly part of bearing fruit, but it's not comprehensive. Colossians 1:10 tells us that we bear fruit in EVERY good work. Everything that we do for Jesus is bearing fruit—anything from teaching the lost to writing some sick brother a card.
  - 2. Second, this passage tells us that people who abide in Jesus bear MUCH fruit. If we're truly in Christ, our actions make it obvious. We should have no trouble looking at our lives and pointing to the fruit we're bearing. If we can't do that, we should seriously question whether we're in Him at all.
- B. The next verse describes the fate of those who do not abide in Jesus, and Him in them: they don't just get to hang out in the general vicinity of the vine. Instead, they are thrown away, gathered up, and burned. Once again, Jesus is staying true to his vineyard metaphor. To this very day, vinedressers gather up the branches they cut off and burn them on the spot. That keeps the branches that have been removed from spreading disease to the healthy branches on the vine. The application is obvious. Even if we are now faithful, if we don't continue to bear fruit, we too will burn.

## IV. **What Next?**

- A. Once we understand this, we need to ask, "What next?" In John 15:7-8, Jesus tells us by outlining two further consequences of abiding in Him, and He in us. First, He tells us, we can ask whatever we wish, and it will be done for us. This means that we have the right to pray. If our lives are right in the eyes of God, we have the privilege of approaching His throne and seeking His help. All of the other passages on prayer apply to this one, of course, but the fact remains. If we are faithful, fruit-bearing Christians, we can seek powerful help from God Himself.
- B. Also, in our fruit-bearing, we glorify God and prove to be disciples of Christ. Let's ask ourselves this: what really glorifies God? Is it the so-called religious people out there who make loud noises about how much they love Jesus, but who only obey His teachings when they feel like it? Or is it true Christians, those who humbly submit everything in their lives to His authority? The answer's clear; only if we live as God wants us to do we show Him the honor He deserves. A child doesn't honor his parents when he disobeys, and when we disobey, we don't honor God. But when we do obey, when we do honor Him, we show ourselves to be Jesus's disciples. Humility and complete submission to God show in every area of Jesus's life. When we ourselves reveal the same humble heart, we show that we've learned what Jesus taught.

**Conclusion.** It's not too late to start bearing fruit. Come back to the vine today.