

Subject: *The Vine and the Branches*

Scripture: *John 15:1-11*

The Bible describes God's relationship with His people in many ways: He is our Father and we are His children. He is our King and we are His subjects. He is our Creator and we are His creatures. He is our Shepherd and we are His sheep. He is the Builder and we are His temple. He is the Master and we are His slaves. He is our Husband and we are His bride. He is our Head and we are His body. In this text the relationship is described as the vine and the branches.

Jesus speaks of spiritual fruit in this text. He uses the image of the vine and branches to describe the Christian life. In simple terms Jesus says that disciples are connected to Him like a branch is connected to a vine, and through that connection to Him we have live and bear fruit. The main truth that Jesus teaches is the importance of abiding in Him (vs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10) so that we will produce spiritual fruit. It has been said that this world needs more spiritual fruit, not religious nuts.

THE VINE (vs. 1, 5)

This is the last of seven statements in John where Jesus used the words "I AM."

- *I am the bread of life (6:35)*
- *I am the light of the world (8:12)*
- *I am the door of the sheep (10:7)*
- *I am the good shepherd (10:11)*
- *I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)*
- *I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)*
- *I am the true vine (15:1)*

Jesus is the true (genuine) vine. The disciples would have understood the image of a vine for two reasons. They lived where vineyards were plentiful. A vine was something they knew well from everyday life. They were also familiar with the Scripture. The nation of Israel was God's vine that He had specially planted and cultivated, but Israel was a disappointment because it brought forth no good fruit.

Isaiah 5:1-4 ¹ Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: ² And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. ⁴ What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?

THE VINEDRESSER (GARDENER) (vs. 1)

God the Father is the husbandman (vinedresser, gardener). He is the owner and overseer of all that takes place in the vineyard. Jesus taught a parable about this:

Matthew 21:33-41 ³³ Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: ³⁴ And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. ³⁵ And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. ³⁷ But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. ³⁸ But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. ³⁹ And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. ⁴⁰ When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? ⁴¹ They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

THE BRANCHES (vs. 2-11)

The branches must abide (remain) in the vine. This is a picture of the believer in Christ. We are connected to Christ by faith and we draw our life from Him. To abide is to remain where we are, to continue in Him. It is the idea of having and maintaining unbroken fellowship with Christ. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. We depend on Him entirely for life, spiritual nourishment and strength, growth, and fruit-bearing. Jesus taught this in the upper room. The drama was high and the lesson was important. The abiding branches represent the eleven true disciples and the non-abiding branches represent people like Judas and other false disciples.

The fruitful branches must be purged (pruned) so they can bear more fruit. God purges us in two ways. He purges us through the teachings of His Word (vs. 3). He purges us by the experiences of life. He uses trials and painful things to discipline us. These are things that God either directs or permits in our lives to make us more fruitful. Most of Christ's teaching deals with the two kinds of branches: branches that bear fruit and branches that don't.

1. The blessings of fruitful branches

- Levels of fruit-bearing (vs. 5) – There are three levels of fruit in this passage: fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. Some believers bear more fruit than others, but all believers bear some fruit. It should always be our concern to bear much fruit.
- Answered prayer (vs. 7) – This clarifies and amplifies what Jesus said in John 14:13 about praying in His name. When we abide in Christ and His words abide in us, we will ask for what pleases and honors Him.
- Glorifying God (vs. 8) – There are many ways to glorify God. Bearing fruit is one of them. Spiritual fruit proves that we are truly Christ's disciples.
- Christ's love (vs. 9-10) – We abide in Christ's love if we obey His commands. These words are similar to what Jesus said in John 14:21, 23.
- Christ's joy (vs. 11) – This is the joy of Christ (my joy). Compare to John 14:27.

2. The burning of fruitless branches

In contrast to the fruitful branches that abide in the vine and glorify God, the branches that bear no fruit are removed and destroyed.

- Fruitless branches are taken away (vs. 2)
- Fruitless branches are gathered and burned (vs. 6)

Those who do not abide in Christ show they never have been saved. They never had a saving relationship with Christ. They may have had some connection with the church and even been a member of the church, but they were never saved. You can be in church and not be in Christ. You can be in a Bible study class and not be in Christ. You can be in a ministry and not be in Christ.

Withered branches are gathered and burned because they are worthless. Unless we are connected to Christ by faith and repentance and unless we bear fruit that glorifies God, our lives are worthless.

***Ezekiel 15:2-4**² Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest?³ Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?⁴ Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet (fit) for any work?*

Israel was like a vine. It had not produced good fruit and was good for nothing. Other trees can be used to build things, but a fruitless vine is useless and fit for the fire. The burning of the fruitless vine was a picture of God's judgment.

What kind of spiritual fruit does Christ produce?

- The fruit of Christian character – Galatians 5:22-23²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*²³ *Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

The modern church got off track when it began to emphasize spiritual gifts more than spiritual fruit. The test of spiritual maturity is fruit, not gifts. In fact, when believers exercise spiritual gifts without spiritual fruit they do more harm than good.

- The fruit of praise and thanksgiving – Hebrews 13:15 *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*
- The fruit of holy, righteous living – Matthew 3:8 *Bring forth therefore fruits meet (fit) for repentance.*
- The fruit of Christian service – Colossians 1:10 *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.*
- The fruit of Christian converts – John 12:24 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*