

August 23, 2015  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 15:1-11.

1. Describe the characteristics of the kind of fruit Jesus expects His followers to produce.
2. Why is it important for followers to produce this fruit?
3. What happens to branches that do not produce fruit, and how is that picture carried out in reality?
4. Why is there an apparent conflict between producing fruit and having joy?
5. What is the connection between God's Word and fruit production?

**ABIDE IN THE VINE**  
**John 15:1-11**

Vine and vineyard pictures are no strangers to the Bible reader. We have discovered that the Old Testament is full of pictures and symbols about vineyards, vines, and fruit. That is because farming was a cornerstone to Israel's economy and much of the Bible is about Israel. A sign of God's blessing in that old economy was a lush vineyard and abundant produce. Therefore, God often used the vineyard as a picture of His people, the chosen nation of Israel.

Jesus capitalized on this same symbolism. In Matthew 20:1-16, He told the story about the vineyard owner who sent laborers into the

vineyard and pays them what he chooses. In that lesson, Jesus taught that in God's economy the last are first and the first last. In Matthew 21:23-31, Jesus told the story of the father who sent two sons to go to work in the vineyard. One lied about going, while the other repented for disobeying and went to work. The lesson was that sinners get into heaven before Pharisees do. In Matthew 21:33-41, Jesus told the pointed story about the tenants who usurped the owner's vineyard and killed his servants and son. Jesus was saying that God is the owner, Israel is the vineyard, and Jesus is the Son the wicked rulers killed. In Luke 13:6-9, Jesus gave a similar picture using the fig tree in the vineyard that needed special care to produce fruit instead of digging it up and burning it. It is a picture of Christ's care for sinners.

In all of these stories, Jesus illustrated God's work with the nation of Israel. The reality that Jesus faced every day was that Israel as a people had failed. They were an unproductive vineyard contrary to the plans and desires of God who planted the vineyard for His own glory.

Now in the last minutes before the authorities came to torture and crucify Him, Jesus changed the picture. Now the vineyard is a beautiful picture of the disciple's, the follower's relationship with Jesus Christ. God is still in charge of the vineyard. The vineyard exists and produces fruit for God's glory. And that glory is only achieved through a vital, intimate relationship between the branches (i.e., the disciples) and the vine (i.e. Jesus Christ).

Before us is some of the most valuable teaching about fruit inspection. Jesus had taught the disciples to be alert to false teachers who would teach stuff that sounded true but would actually lead people into rebellion against their Creator and ultimately to eternity in hell. Jesus taught, *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits"* (Matthew 7:15-20). Then immediately Jesus warned that many would claim on judgment day that they had

been very religious having done mighty works in His name. To them, Jesus warned, He would condemn them to eternal punishment because He and they never had an intimate relationship.

How often have we wondered or heard someone ask, “Do you think so-and-so is a Christian?” Why the question? Most of the time, it is not our responsibility to make that call. However, it is always our responsibility to make the call regarding our own relationship with the Savior. How do I know if I am really a follower of Christ, or just someone who is riding a religious bandwagon? Well, what does my fruit look like? A branch attached to the Vine Jesus Christ produces a particular and identifiable kind of fruit.

### **Jesus Challenges Us to Abide in Him (vv.1-8).**

At the outset of our study of these eleven verses, we need to identify the figures of speech. This is self-evident in the text. For example, God the Son is the true vine. Jesus plainly stated, *I am the vine* (v.5a). The vine in question is a grape vine; not ivy and certainly not kudzu. In that agrarian culture, everyone would have understood the picture Jesus drew. In fact, at the moment He drew the picture small vineyards of blossoming grapevines could have been visible even in the darkness that surrounded them.

The word “vine” in this and other parallel word pictures refers to the trunk or the main part of the grapevine. The trunk is attached to the roots which draw the moisture and nutrients from the soil which are then passed through the entire system.

But why did Jesus teach, *I am the true vine* (v.1). At various places in the Old Testament God referred to the nation of Israel as His vine that He had planted. For example, the Psalmist prays, *Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved! You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it* (Psalm 80:7-8). This is especially the case in the vineyard story Isaiah preached. That was the same story Jesus had just applied a couple of days earlier (before the setting of our text) to rebellious Israel and their apostate leaders (Matt. 21:33ff). Isaiah had declared, *Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in*

*the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes* (Isaiah 5:1-2). Israel was indeed God’s vine or vineyard. But it was a rebellious vine. Therefore, in contrast to the apostate vines who rejected God, Jesus is the true vine. As such, He alone is the source of righteous sustenance.

In the second figure of speech, we see that God the Father is the vinedresser. Jesus said that He is the vine *and my Father is the vinedresser* (v.1b). Typically, the owner of a vineyard hired vinedressers to care for the vines. But God the Father is intimately concerned for the well being of His vineyard Himself. Therefore, He Himself cares for it. He sits in the watch tower in the center of the vineyard to ward off any little foxes who would spoil the vines and to chase away any robbers. He goes in and out among the branches to prune, heal, and encourage.

As the divine and perfect vinedresser, God knows exactly how to prune to encourage greater fruit production. Jesus described God’s work like this: *Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit* (v.2). The vinedresser was a farmer who tilled the soil, removed rocks, planted new vines, fertilized, and watered. But his two most important tasks, which required a certain skill, were pruning new growth and removing dead branches. Proper pruning of the grapevine requires that the branch be cut exactly at the proper height above the new bud, angled away from the bud so that water does not rot the new bud. In similar fashion, pruning forces new buds to produce new branches on which the new fruit will grow. Pruning cuts away dead wood that takes up space and carries disease.

In the third figure of speech, we learn that the followers of Christ are branches (v.5b). Christ said that He is the vine, the Father is the vinedresser, and *you are the branches* (v.5b). The branches are connected to the vine from which they draw nourishment. Cut the branch from the vine and it dies. When the vine produces fruit, it becomes evident on the branch.

Understand the lesson. God’s plan is that branches that are connected to the vine **will** produce fruit. Notice four very important traits about branches that produce fruit. First, productive branches are clean branches. Jesus told the disciples, *Already you are clean*

*because of the word that I have spoken to you (v.3).* The idea of cleanness speaks of regeneration. In the picture of the vine, the branches are clean after the vinedresser goes through with his knife and trims out the dead wood and diseased wood. The knife in the hand of God the vinedresser is the word of God.

Jesus assured the eleven “branches” that they were clean because of the word He had spoken. The Word is the Bible, the words of God through Christ. Other Scripture teaches how the Word of God is effective in cleansing. *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).* Also, the Word of God cleanses away sin. Jesus loved the Church and gave Himself for her *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:26).* Furthermore, the Word of God regenerates or gives new life. Jesus promised, *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63).*

Now Jesus revealed that the eleven disciples had been born again through the Word of Christ, so that He could assure them they were already clean. It is like what He told Peter a few hours earlier as He washed the disciples’ feet. *Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you” (John 13:10).* Spiritual cleanness, salvation, is a critical aspect for branches before they bear fruit. Therefore, the very religious, sincere, but unregenerated church-goer is not connected to the vine and cannot produce good fruit.

Second, the productive branches are not only clean, but they are abiding branches. The branch lying on the ground beside the vine will never produce fruit. To that end Jesus said, *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me (v.4).* There can be no fruit production if the branch is not connected to the vine. There is no abiding if there has never been a “grafting into” the vine. We are grafted in when we trust God’s word that our sins are covered by the blood of Christ. That faith, that trust, establishes a union between the vine and the branch. From that moment on, we who are grafted into

the vine understand and experience an intimate relationship with Christ. We are *remaining* in Him.

When the branch continues to remain in the vine, there will be fruit. Jesus taught, *Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (v.5b).* Remaining in Christ is a very real dependance on Christ. In that relationship, we become acutely aware that on our own we cannot accomplish anything of value. Oh, we might build big buildings, gather larger congregations, make a name for ourselves, or build a monument through human wisdom and human strength. But fruit to the glory of God is produced only by our full dependance on Christ the vine.

This must be the case because of the third characteristic of fruit bearing branches. Productive branches are also “Word-infused” branches. Jesus said, *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (v.7).* Our abiding in Christ is equivalent to His words abiding in us. How so? If I am abiding in Christ, I am practicing full dependance on Him who I trust. So what do I depend on? How do I depend on Him? I lean wholly on the truths of His Word, the promises He has made, and the character that backs up those promises and truths. The more I read, meditate on, understand, and memorize the Bible, the more familiar I am with the God who wrote it. The more I know and experience God, the better I know what He desires in me.

When Christ’s words abide in me, I know what to ask for. By nature we ask for silly things, bad things, selfish things. That is why God’s promise of Holy Spirit intercession is so important to us. Paul reminded us, *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26).* But as we know God more, our desires are shaped by His will expressed in His word. When our desires conform to God’s will as He has expressed it in the Bible, God delights to give us what we pray for. In that setting, David’s confidence comes to bear. He concluded, *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4).*

The fourth characteristic of productive branches is that they prove their connection to the Vine by glorifying the Father. *By this*

*my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples (v.8), Jesus taught. God is glorified by fruit (works) that honors Him. We know that what honors God is what reflects His character. The kind of works that reflect His character are clearly spelled out in the Bible. Therefore, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount which establishes many works that reflect God's character, Jesus taught: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).*

Jesus' words to the disciples mark the third time that evening that He taught how we prove that we are His disciples. We prove we are His followers by loving other followers (13:35). We prove we are His followers by rejoicing that He, the Son, is with the Father (14:28), which was necessary for the sending of the Holy Spirit. We prove we are His followers by bearing much fruit.

Because these four truths are so, the connected branches **will** produce fruit. It is not that clean branches, abiding branches, Word-infused branches, and God-glorifying branches could produce fruit. It is not that such branches have the potential to produce fruit. If those traits are true about us, we **will** produce fruit. What kind of fruit; what does it look like? There are many kinds of fruit, but not all of it reflects God's glory or the character of God's Spirit. For example, there are works of the flesh like sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, enmity, strife, etc. (Gal. 5:19-20). And then there is fruit that flows out of the Holy Spirit like love, joy, peace, patience, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23). That kind of fruit brings glory to God. Abiding branches produce fruit like that.

Several years ago, I wrote this simple tract that has a picture of a fruit tree on the front cover and asks this simple question, "Why doesn't this tree produce apples?" Opening the cover you find the answer, "Because peach trees don't produce apples." The thrust of the tract causes people to ask what kind of fruit they produce in their lives. The inspection is necessary because only clean branches (born

again people), who are abiding in Christ (a trusting relationship), infused by the word of God (reading it, knowing it) are going to produce fruit that looks like God's character.

That is the purpose for which God originally created us. Paul concluded, *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)*. Or we could look at the first two questions and answers from the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Q: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify Him and enjoy Him?

A: The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

That is God-honoring fruit.

Conversely, where there is no fruit production evident, the branches are destroyed. God the Father removes fruitless branches. Jesus warned, *Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away (v.2a)*. We have spent much time learning that every branch that is abiding in Christ the vine will produce fruit. Here are some branches that appear to be or claim to be "of mine" – that is, belonging to the vine. This is as common as multitudes of people who claim they are "Christian" – that is, "like Christ" or "of Christ" – but are not.

Jesus warned that there would be those who for some time appear to be part of His but were are not. He taught that there is ground that responds well to the Good Seed at first, but then the seed is choked out and does not produce fruit (Mt. 13:1-23). There are tares that grow among the good wheat, but they are not wheat (Mt. 13:24-30). There are all kinds of fish that come up in the dragnet, but the junk is sorted out and burned (Mt. 13:47-50). These are the kind of people John wrote about who appeared to be part of "us" but eventually broke off fellowship because they were not of us (1 John 2:19). These are the people described in Hebrews 6:1-8 who met with the Church, observed the work of the Holy Spirit, and shared in blessings, but who rejected the truth and became apostates. These are branches like Judas who lived with Jesus for three years and then

betrayed Him to execution because he was not clean (John 13:11). God the vinedresser takes them away from the productive branches.

Fruitless branches are non-abiding branches and are fit for the fire. Here is the serious warning: *If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned (v.6).* Jesus pictured it like this in the parable of the wheat and tares: *“So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:49-50).*

Seeing their inescapable demise, these branches will protest that they did indeed bear righteous fruit. *“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ (Matthew 7:22).* Jesus will judge them as non-branches. *“And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’ (Matthew 7:23).* The Vine knows the branches who are abiding in Him. Therefore, we do well to heed . . . **Jesus Challenges Us to Abide in His Love (vv.9-11).**

The challenge is for us to remain in divine love. Jesus practices God-like love. He said, *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you (v.9a).* Clean branches, abiding branches, Word- infused branches are the special object of the Vine’s love. How much does God the Father love God the Son? That is how much Christ loves us whom He has cleansed with His own blood!

We are to stay in that love. *Abide in my love (v.9b)* Jesus told us and the disciples. This means that we are responsible to keep on remaining in that love. This is a hard saying. He who chose us before the foundation of the earth, He who drew us to Himself so that we are redeemed tells us to be responsible to remain in His love. That is because we live in the flesh that demands that we please it. To please the flesh is to love self, and it is impossible to love ourselves and love Christ too. So what must we do to remain in His love?

We remain in Christ’s love by obeying Christ’s commands. We can abide in divine love only if we abide in divine commands. *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love (v.10a).* This is the same truth Jesus established previously: *“If you love me, you will*

*keep my commandments” (John 14:15).* In that context, we learned that Jesus gave over 200 imperatives. And then John has the nerve to tell us that His commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). Is it even possible for us to remain in Christ’s love by keeping His commands? Yes, it is, because He who became one of us and who was completely without sin showed us how to do this.

Jesus already demonstrated this truth. He said, *“Just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (v.10b).* He who said, *“Not my will but God’s be done”* showed us how to obey. He who died to Himself by laying aside His glory showed us that to truly trust God the Father is to truly love God the Father.

Obedience to Christ might be difficult, but it is not bad. In fact, obedience brings joy. The obedience is in light of *these things*. Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken to you” (v.11a).* These things must include all the words Jesus taught for three years. More specifically, these things includes the specific words about fruit bearing through an ongoing intimate relationship. The purpose for *these things* is that true, complete joy is found through radical response. Jesus spoke these things *that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (v.11b).* All human nature chaffs at having to do what we are told. Human pride, like Satanic pride, exalts itself against commands from authorities. Our flesh is particularly sensitive to the perfect holiness God expresses. But Jesus taught that true joy is found when we remember that we are attached to the Vine and are wholly dependent upon Him for life and fruit bearing.

So we conclude that the branch that produces fruit that reflects God’s glory is: A clean, regenerated branch; A branch that remains in an intimate relationship with Christ through His love; A branch that is infused with Christ’s Word; A branch that proves that infusion by knowing Christ’s commands and desiring to keep them, and a branch that is joyful as it produces Christ-like fruit.