

Intro

As you may know, I am not a gardener. I sometimes mow the lawn, and that's about it. But I think that more of us have spend more time in our gardens over the last year then ever before! And I am sure I do not have to tell you why!

So I hope that you have enjoyed being in the garden – even if it is to read a book...

Abiding in the Vine

Having said that I am not a gardener the image that Jesus uses as a vine that needs pruning does speak to me and I hope to you. But often when analogies are used to illustrate a concept, there is a point where it analogy breaks down. And often it is in this breaking point that the core of the analogy lies. And that is the same here.

The first two verse setup the analogy: Jesus it the vine, God the Father is the gardener. And as he prunes he takes of every branch that does not bear fruit, to take of excess leaves and shoots so that shoots with fruit can focus on growing grapes.

In our previous garden we did have a vine growing on pergola – as it was nice for the shade. And it had many large leaves to protect against the sunlight, but the grapes were pitiful and sour. If I had pruned the vine more actively (and knew how to do it) it would have produced more and better grapes. So, yes, the analogy makes sense.

Jesus then extends the analogy: the branches on the vine become the disciples, and he reassures the disciples as well: ‘you are already clean, because of what I have taught you.’ The word for cleaning and pruning in Greek sound very similar, and have in a way similar meaning.

But then the analogy starts to break in v4: “remain in me and I will remain in you”. Or in an other translations it may read: “abide in me, as I will abide in you.” But a branch on a vine does not have a choice, does it? It is connected to the vine and grows by taking the sap from the vine. But it cannot say: I like to be disconnected please. But the disciples have that choice. This is where it the analogy breaks down and where the meaning is: the disciples need to ensure that they remain / abide in Jesus.

He emphasizes this point again in vs 5: I am the vine and you are the branches and then he extends it: “Whoever abides in

me and I in them” (nrsv). So not only the disciples are offered this – everyone (whoever).

But what does this mean “abide in me and I abide in you”, or “remain in me and I will remain in you”? Let’s go back to analogy of the vine and the branches. What does the vine give to the branches? Nourishment in the form of a sap. Now, I do not know if you have ever cut off a major branch of a vine in season – but I seem to remember that when we did it water was flowing out of the vine – it bled.

Although Jesus does not say so specifically, I have the sense that in the analogy of the sap is the Holy Spirit. By remaining in Jesus and he in us he feeds us with his Holy Spirit.

“Whoever believes in me...rivers of living water will flow from within them”.

But we can choose how much of the Holy Spirit we want and how much we want to remain in Jesus. We control the tap. And this is second area where the analogy with the real vine breaks done

Bearing fruit

But then Jesus also includes “the bearing of fruit” into the analogy, which I have skipped over so far: v4: “No branch can bear fruit by itself ... neither can you bear fruit unless you

remain in me”, or v4: The person who remains in Jesus will “bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing”. The purpose of the branches is to bear fruit. And this is echoed later in v8: “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples”. Disciples are not recognised because they remain or abide in Jesus, but they recognised because they produce much fruit. And the fruit is giving Glory to the Father.

Not remaining in Jesus

In this analogy Jesus also touches on what happens to a person who does not remain in Jesus: He is like a branch that is thrown away and withers, which are then picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. It is not God who judges, it is us who choose not to remain in Jesus. The consequence is that the sap of the Holy Spirit cannot feed us and we wither and do not produce fruit. But I do not think that Jesus indicates that this is irreversible. Both times Jesus uses the words “the person is like a..” It indicates a branch that is not healthy and in the normal economy of life will be thrown and burned. But I think we all have a choice to open the connection to the vine that is Jesus. This is the 3rd point where the analogy breaks down. Branches away from the vine will die – Jesus allows us to open up the tap again and re-enter in a relationship with him. But for how long?

And how do we loose the connection with the vine that is Jesus? Jesus already indicated it is our choice. If we remain in him we need to spend time with him. In prayer and reading God's word.

But sins also will turn of the tap: Galatians 5:19-21a has a clear list for us:

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

You probably do not inhabit all of these, but some of these are cutting it close to the mark. I also do not think that Paul put these in a specific order!

The good thing is that Jesus prunes us so that we become more like him. And ask for forgiveness and stop doing these things (to repent) we will open the tap again

And then our lives will inhabit more what follows in Galatians:

22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
23 gentleness, and self-control

Producing fruit

But I also think there is another reason why we stop remaining in him: and that is if we do not want to grow fruit. This is another area where the analogy breaks down. We can choose not to produce fruit. The reading from James (2:18): “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. (NRSV). Jesus himself says in v8 that it is to the Father’s glory that you bear much fruit. - and that this is the way that you show yourself to be Jesus’s disciples.

By remaining in him we produce fruit. And it is when we are motivated to produce fruit that Jesus says the words in v7: “If you remain in me and I in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.” Because if we remain in Jesus and he in us, we wish things that help us to produce fruit, and he will give us those things that help us produce fruit.

What is the fruit

But what is the fruit you may ask? Later in the year we will look at 6 topics to help us see what this fruit is

- *Modelling* Godly character
- *Making* good work
- *Ministering* grace and love
- *Moulding* culture
- Being a *Mouthpiece* for truth and justice
- Being a *Messenger* of the gospel

Summary

So in summary: Jesus uses the analogy of him as the vine and we as the branches how we do mission for him and with him and stay well as people. We looked at where the analogy broke down as indicators of great importance. And all of these are related to our choices

1. It is our choice to remain in him. We have control over how much we want to receive from Jesus: we own the tap of the nourishment flowing in us.
2. We remain in him by spending time with Jesus in praying and reading the bible
3. We remain in him by choosing how we behave. Do we actively avoid sin that takes us away of Jesus? And when we sin do we repent and ask for forgiveness?
4. We remain in him by choosing to produce fruit for Jesus. It is the last item that grows the Kingdom, as new branches are

then grafted into the vine. And it is also this one that is to the Father's glory!

Amen.