

The True Vine

John 15 v 1 – 17

Who's the Vine? We're looking at some teaching Jesus did using the metaphor of a vine. Well known to many of you, but let's open our hearts and minds to what God wants to say to us, today. *Lord, speak to us through Your word. I open my mind and my heart to whatever You want to say to me.*

TV ad featuring robot: 'Who's the Daddy?'

Presumably, developed from the triumphant question and response with high fives: 'Who's the man?', 'You're the man!'

I'm asking 'Who's the Vine?'

Who is the vine? Jesus.

Jesus said he is the True Vine.

You know this, but I want us to get it from our heads into our '*believery*', the place where it will actually affect our lives.

About a vine: The vine has roots which go down into the soil drawing up water and nutrients. The roots also keep the whole plant anchored firm in the ground.

About the branches.

We've established who the vine is: Jesus.

Who are the branches?

We are.

We, who have put our trust in Jesus, are like branches growing from the vine.

About the vine-dresser.

I prefer 'Vine-dresser' to 'gardener';

A gardener is a generalist, a vine-dresser is a specialist – knows all about vine-branches and how to get them to produce good fruit.

Jesus says His Father is the vine-dresser.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, His Father is the vine-dresser.

Cutting off

The vine-dresser takes out any branches which aren't fruitful.

We are the branches.

Why would we want to be unfruitful?

Why would we want to be unsalty salt?

Why would we want to shine under a bucket?

What would be the point?

Something is badly wrong if there is no fruit in our lives.

Jesus has chosen us and appointed us to bear fruit!

Wow!

Why wouldn't we want to do that for the Saviour who loved us, died for us and made us new?

About the fruit:

Gal.5 v 22f The fruit of the Holy Spirit – **Jesus' character** manifest in us.

Luke 4 v 18, 19 **Jesus' work**, which we are to continue

- preaching good news of salvation,
- proclaiming freedom to people enslaved by sin,
- opening people's eyes to the truth,
- releasing people oppressed by Satan,
- proclaiming that God has come into this world to do us good.

- And (Gt Commission) making more disciples of Jesus.

Eph. 4 v 12 Works He has prepared in advance for us to do

2Tim 3 v 17 Scripture equips us to do every good work

The fruit the Father wants to see in us is a character like Jesus and good works that He has called us to.

Cutting back/pruning – good wood, fruitful wood!

There are two purposes of the pruning:

The first is to do with **character**, so that we bear the fruit of the Spirit:

Jesus says His disciples are already clean i.e. pruned through His teaching. Their characters and thought processes have been shaped by His teaching and they are now ready to receive the empowering Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of works.

The Father will use His Word to make us fit for purpose, snipping away, shaping us to be more like Jesus.

It is the Father's work, through His Word, to prune us;

It is *our* responsibility to deal with sin in our lives.

Only He can forgive us and restore us by His sacrificial death, but resisting temptation and repentance for sin are *our* responsibility.

Secondly: Vine branches will grow to seven or eight feet long, if left. We once neglected to take out the side shoots of the tomato plants which were thriving in the greenhouse. Gardeners among you will imagine the tangled chaos which ensued.

So, let's say we're bearing fruit and we're growing and growing and developing the gifts He's given us and the work is growing and we're becoming better at whatever he's given us to do and more confident and along comes Father, the Vine-dresser, with his lopping tool and, *lop*, He takes off all that lovely, healthy, fruit-bearing wood and all that's left is a little spur. Several feet of healthy wood gone and only a couple of inches still attached to the vine.

Who's the Vine? Jesus.

What does the Vine do?

It provides the water, the nourishment, the stability, the sap – all that the branch needs in order to be fruitful.

The trouble is, you see, that when we grow and develop the gifts he's given us and gain confidence we begin to be self-reliant: 'I can *do* this!' 'I can do this!'

We grow away from the Vine, we don't depend on Him.

Eventually, there is more and more branch and less and less fruit.

Father wants us to depend on the Vine, to receive all we need from Him.

Yes, we are to use and develop the gifts He's given us.

Yes, we are to use our brains and effort to do His work, but we must remain totally dependent on Him.

Last week, we heard how Gideon and his army got drastically pruned, so that they were totally dependent on God for victory.

So many works, so many churches, have foundered because they became self-reliant and self-perpetuating.

About abiding

I like the word 'abide' better than 'remain'; it seems to me to suggest a more permanent, committed state.

It comes 9 times in the first 11 verses of this chapter.
Jesus certainly wants us to get hold of the concept of abiding.

An electrical appliance can't fulfil its purpose unless it's plugged into the power source.

We can't be fruitful, if we don't abide – stay, remain attached to, 'be vitally united to' (Amp) the Vine!

Who is the Vine? What does He do? He is the source of all we need to be fruitful.

How to abide in Jesus

How can we continue to be vitally united to Him?

In verses 9 – 13 and the previous chapter

Jesus teaches that there is a strong love-obedience connection;

if we love Jesus, we will obey His commands;

if we obey His commands, we show our love for Him.

Jn. 14 v 23 If anyone loves Me, He will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

N.B. this is not about salvation – we are not saved by our obedience, but by believing in Jesus, who died for our sins.

This is about us abiding in Him and He in us.

Notice that He says: (You) Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. The initiative is ours – we are to abide in Him and then all we need from him will be available to us.

If the branch breaks off from the vine, the sap cannot flow into it, it will wither and die.

We must abide in Jesus and draw all we need from Him. We must remain in His love, and that involves obedience.

As the Vine, so the branch

Verse 10 If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed the Father's commands and remain in His love.

Verse 12 My command is this: Love each other, as I have loved you.

As the Vine, so the branch;

As Jesus obeyed, so must we.

As Jesus loved, so must we.

Whoa! Okay. Hang on! Can't do it! I can't. I really can't love people as Jesus loved us and laid down His life for us.

It's no good, however hard I try, I can't do it.

So I can't obey his command and I can't abide?

It's okay; breathe easy.

'Obey, even as I; love, even as I' are *meant* to bring us to the consciousness of our impotence and to wake us to the need and sufficiency of what is provided for us in the Vine.

It's moment by moment, choosing to obey, choosing to love and drawing all we need from Him to do that.

Who's the Vine?

Who is the source of all we need to bear good fruit?

How do we tap into that?

We abide in Him.

It's circular. We must stay firmly fixed, attached to the Vine, dependent on the Vine, and we will receive all we need to live a Godly life, to obey, to love, to abide.

As the Vine, so the branch – His joy, my joy.

v.11 I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Andrew Murray: 'If the thought of a life abiding in Christ is one of strain and painful effort, it's because we haven't yielded ourselves wholeheartedly to the life of Christ in us.'

God alone is the fountain of joy. If we don't believe this, we will try to fill the need for joy, satisfaction and fulfilment in other ways.

Words of old hymn: '*I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, but, ah, their waters failed.*' Broken cisterns – picking up the water bottle to quench thirst and finding it is cracked and the water has run away.

So, it is with 'Jesus-substitutes' – things we turn to try to fill our need for satisfaction, fulfilment, joy. Many are not intrinsically bad things, and will give a measure of what we seek, but will fail us eventually, because only Jesus is the source of all we need.

*Now, none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me.
There's love and life and lasting joy,
Christ Jesus, found in Thee.*

He is the source of all we need. He is the source of joy and satisfaction and fulfilment.

Whatever you ask

What about the verses where Jesus says we can ask whatever we wish and the Father will give us it? Well, I've asked for many things, some I've received, many I haven't. But, a verse without a context is a pretext. Let's look at the context:

Verse 7, 8 and 16

If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.

*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. **Then** the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name.*

The key words are *if* and *then*.

If you remain in Me and My words remain in you

...go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, *then* My Father will give you ...

WHEN we are abiding in Him, drawing all we need to live godly lives from Him;

when we are letting Father prune us back;

when we are letting the Word of God renew our minds;

when the Holy Spirit is flowing in our spirit and producing His fruit in us;

when we are dealing with sin in our lives by repentance and resisting temptation (Freedom in Christ is very good on how to do that!),

THEN we will ask in accordance with His will – in His name – and we will receive what we ask.

Each disciple needs to abide and draw sustenance from Jesus.

Each disciple needs to be willing to let the Father prune, to produce good fruit.

Similarly, each fellowship needs to abide in Jesus and receive all it needs from Him and be willing to let Him prune it back.

St Andrews:

Let the Father prune us back, removing anything, however good, which is solely of our effort;
things which might have been good once, but are past their use-by date;
things which were good ideas, but not God-ideas;
things which work somewhere else, but are not what God is wanting for us, here and now.

As individuals – ask Father to show what in us needs to be pruned back;
allow Him to take us back that that little spur that is absolutely dependent on Him to produce the fruit that He desires in us. Fruit that will last, fruit that has eternal significance; fruit that brings glory to God.

‘The Shoes of the Fisherman’ a novel by Morris West:

*The history of spiritual progress for an individual
was the history of his preparation of himself to cooperate
more willingly, more consciously, and more gratefully with the grace of God.*

Jesus says to each one of us and to us as a fellowship of believers:

I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

Jesus chose us and appointed us to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

How are we going to bear fruit?

By abiding in Jesus.

Where will we get all that we need to be fruitful?

From Jesus.

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