

## John 15:1-8

*<sup>1</sup> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."*

1 The vine clearly represented Israel. The Old Testament prophets made that abundantly clear (Isaiah 5:7a). However, many of those references to Israel as the vine also describe Israel as failing to bear good fruit (Isaiah 5:2). They had not been a light to the world. They did not keep their covenant with God. They were not the holy nation that God intended (Exodus 19:5,6). Into this history steps Jesus declaring, <sup>1</sup> *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser"* which was the last of Jesus' "I AM" declarations. It was a startling revelation. Like all the other "I AM" declarations, it pointed to His divinity. We find meaning of a word by its first use in Scripture. In this case the word truth is first found in God's self-disclosure in Exodus 34:6. Sometimes translated "faithfulness" it is most commonly translated as truth (The LXX is the same word).

It declared that Israel as a nation had not born fruit, so God sent a man to fulfill Israel's destiny (an example to the nations and the source of spiritual life). God sent one man to do what the nation did not do. How is that possible? Is it Scriptural?

Actually, it was predicted in the Psalms. Psalm 80 verses 8 through 18 tell the story of the vine. The psalm begins by crying out for restoration and salvation. In verse 8, it begins to tell of how God brought a vine out of Egypt. He planted it, and it flourished. Then it was abandoned and went to ruin. The prophets told the people it was because of their sins that God had to abandon it (Isaiah 5:6,7). Then the psalm takes a very prophetic turn.

<sup>17</sup> *But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!* <sup>18</sup> *Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!* <sup>19</sup> *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!* (ESV) Who is at the right hand of God? Who called Himself the Son of Man? Who has God raised up for Himself? Who can bring people to God in such a way that they will no longer turn away? Who was the face of God shining upon them that the people may be saved? The answer is clearly the true vine, Jesus Christ!

*<sup>2</sup> Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

2 The Father is the gardener who prunes the branches. Non-fruit bearing branches usually go straight up in the air and hog the nutrients, water, and light, from the other branches that do produce fruit. We call them water suckers. They must be cut off. Pruning is an annual job, and for some grape farmers it continues through the year as little shoots spring up that draw nutrients away from the main fruit bearing branches. Then there is the care of the fruit bearing branches. They must be pruned of unproductive side shoots so that each branch has its place in the sun. Even fruit bearing branches can develop suckers that reduce the branches productivity. They must be pruned of these to produce the good fruit.

We can look back to the prophets' pictures that declare that the fruit God was looking for was justice and righteousness. We can also look back to what Jesus had just

talked about in the last chapter, just before they left the upper room. He was talking about love and joy. They are the first of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23) and will result in justice and righteousness. They are the natural by-products of being in Jesus, the vine. It is His love and joy in us. I will only have them when I am in Him.

If you recognize that supernatural fruit of the Spirit in you, you welcome the pruning process. You may not enjoy it, but you are living to please the Lord, and you want those things removed that drain you from being fruitful.

*<sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.*

3 For Jesus, the use of the word pruning meant a life that conforms to God's holiness through the lopping off those areas that incline us toward evil. We need to let the Word of God expose what is not fruitful. As we conform our lives to the Word, the bad shoots are cut away. We need to believe the Word is the revelation from God describing what is best for us (Deuteronomy 4:40). Is the Word of God doing its pruning work in your life?

*<sup>4</sup> 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.*

4 Pruning away that which robs us is essential, but it is even more important to stay connected. Jesus just told them that He is in the Father and we are in Him and He is in us (John 14:20). What does it mean to remain in Him? "Remain in me means to continue in a daily, personal relationship with Jesus, characterized by trust, prayer, obedience, and joy."

It is just not possible to bear fruit unless we remain in the One who came to live among us. He is the source of the fruit. The only branch that was ever cut off and yet flowered and bore fruit was the rod of Aaron (Numbers 17:8), a picture of resurrection and the authentication of God's calling (Numbers 17:10). Only Jesus really bears fruit, but He is willing to bear it through your life and mine if we will just stay in Him. We have resurrected life in Him. The emphasis of bearing fruit, or being fruitful, goes all the way back to the first chapter of Genesis where it is repeated three times. The prophecies about the ultimate conclusion of the true Israel include fruitfulness (Isaiah 27:6; Hosea 14:4-8). Fruitfulness has always been on the heart of God.

God's desire for every one of us is that we are fruitful. He wants to see His love flow from our lives to others. He desires for His infectious joy in us to draw others to Him. He wants His peace in us to overcome all the fear that the enemy of our soul would have us believe. We could go on with each fruit and how it transforms us and those with whom we come in contact. Fruitfulness has always been God's desire for His people.

*<sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

5 This is basically what Jesus said about His relationship with God. He relied on the Father for everything. He did not act without the Father (John 14:31). He knows that man without God can accomplish nothing of lasting meaning and value. Therefore, if you

want your life to have the fruitfulness that God always intended for it to have, you must remain in Him. You were made to live in Him and by Him. That is the only way to produce spiritual fruit. It is a very intimate relationship.

*<sup>6</sup> 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.*

6 On one of our trips to Israel, we passed through the Valley of Elah where David killed Goliath. As we traveled down a side road, we passed a vinedresser who was burning his prunings right beside his vineyard. I said, “Stop the bus! We are witnessing John 15:6!” It really was amazing to see what you read about taking place in the land that Jesus first spoke it. It was also a vivid reminder that we must stay in the vine (Ezekiel 15:1-8). I can tell you sadly of lives that have been tossed in the fire because they would not stay in the vine. They no longer bear fruit. I can tell you of some that are in danger right now of being picked up and tossed. Pray for them!

What is it that causes the disconnect? Do they want the fruit of the Spirit? Who does not want love, joy, and peace? The fruit comes at the cost of remaining in Jesus, dependent on Him. The disconnect comes when we want to go our own way, self-dependent, the lord over our own lives. It is when we are dazzled by the lie that we are missing something, some fleshly desire, some type of satisfaction that is temporal or that we are self-sufficient. Then, for many, the pleasures of this world and self-seeking become an addiction and they will not return. They remain fruitless, dried up, ready for the fire.

*<sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

7 When you are in Jesus and His word is in you, you ask for His will to be done. You pray according to His word. You ask for souls to be saved, for spiritual growth, for His kingdom to come. The reason Jesus could say this is because He knows that when we are in Him and His words are in us, we are not asking to fulfill our lusts (James 4:3). We desire what He desires and are praying His will into the earth. We wish what He wishes because His life is flowing through us, and that results in fruitfulness.

*<sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

8 As we abide in Him and let His word abide in us, we pray His will into the earth. The sharp two-edged sword of the Word prunes us (Hebrews 4:12). We bear much fruit, not just a little scrawny bitter fruit. That annual, abundant fruitfulness always brings glory to God the Father. A fruitful life is the evidence that we are Jesus’ disciples. We are what God always intended His people to be and that glorifies Him because people see His heart for mankind (Exodus 19:6).

Questions:

Why did Jesus say the “true” vine?

What was the Scriptural authority for that statement?

Why are fruitful branches pruned?

What fruit is mentioned in Old and New Testament vine passages?

Name some fruitless branches in our lives?

What prunes these from our lives?

What does it mean to remain or abide in Jesus?

What is the goal of an abundantly fruitful life?