

Jesus and His disciples had just celebrated the Passover meal together. Judas had left to meet with Jesus' enemies. The end of the last chapter tells us they rose up to leave. Their final destination is Gethsemane, but chapters 15 through 17 take place somewhere other than Gethsemane and the Upper Room. I thought it was en route through the Kidron Valley, but I have come to believe it was in the Temple. The Temple was open all night on Passover. Chapter 18 begins by telling us that Jesus and His disciples "went out and crossed the Kidron Valley". (John 18:1) So from where did they come out?

Another clue is found in Josephus' description of the Temple. If you were standing in the Court of the Women and looked over the altar to the door that entered the Holy Place, you would have seen a golden grape vine 100 feet in height and 37 feet wide, a magnificent work of art. Josephus tells us that some of the grape clusters were as tall as a man. Wealthy Jews donated additional gold pieces such as tendrils, leaves, and fruit to be added to the vine. There was so much gold in the Temple that when the Titus ransacked it, the price of gold in Syria plunged by 50%. It may have been in the Temple court, perhaps even motioning to this great work of art, that Jesus spoke these sayings to His disciples.

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 the covenant with God. They were not the holy nation that God intended. (Exodus 19:5-6) Into this history steps Jesus and says, ¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. That was the last of Jesus' "I AM" declarations, it pointed to His divinity. 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 is now looking to one man to do what the nation didn't do. How is that possible? Is it Scriptural?

Actually, it was predicted in the Psalms. Psalm 80, verses 8 through 18, tells the story of the vine. The psalm begins by crying out for restoration, for 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.

¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. ¹⁸ Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. ¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. Psalms 80:17-19 (NIV) 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 clear, the true vine, Jesus Christ!

Commented [notes1]: 1 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. John 18:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. Isaiah 5:7a (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Isaiah 5:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." Ex 19:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 8 You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. 9 You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. 11 It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. 12 Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? 13 Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it. 14 Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, 15 the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. 16 Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. 17 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. 18 Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Psalms 80:8-18 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 6 I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." 7 The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress. Isaiah 5:6-7 (NIV)

Think about this! The Jews were singing this Psalm for almost a thousand years, crying out for the coming of the true vine. Here He is! The Son of Man, declaring, "I am the true vine!" The countenance of God was upon them that they might be saved, just as they had prayed for so long. Sometimes we don't see the answer to our prayers even when He is staring us in the face.

The Father is the gardener or vinedresser. He is the one that cares for the vine. In the context of the passage, He is the One that prunes the vine. Isaiah's song of the vineyard has God preparing the soil, planting the vine, and caring for it, only to end up with bad fruit. That was the vine out of Egypt, the physical descendants of the Exodus. But there is another vine, the true vine, Jesus Christ. The Father will carefully prune this vine. ² *He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*

I have done a lot of pruning since my wife's family are fruit farmers. I've pruned apple trees since I was a teen. One important step is clearing out any dead or non-fruit bearing branches. Dead branches provide a way for rot and pests to enter the trunk, so they are cut away close to the trunk so the bark can heal over the wound. Non-fruit bearing branches usually go straight up in the air and hog the nutrients, water, and light from the other branches that actually produce fruit. We call them suckers. They must be cut off. That is the main kind of pruning. 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.

My first thought when I read this passage was, what is fruit? If that is what God is after, I want to know what it is. I don't want to be cut off for lack of it. I think 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 won't have them if I'm not in Him.

The question then is, "Are the fruits of the Spirit in my life?" I can be among the branches but be dead or fruitless. (Mark 4:7) Is there love, joy, peace, patience and the rest of the fruit in my life? If not, you need to humble yourself before God, repent of being your own god, surrender your life to Him. Ask for His life giving Spirit to produce His fruit in you, (Luke 11:13) which may mean either being grafted in, or being pruned.

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. It reminds me of Jesus'

Commented [notes7]: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Gal 5:22-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Mark 4:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11:13 (NIV)

declaration in the last chapter that the Prince of this World had no hold on Him. (John 14:30) Jesus had no handles with which Satan could yank Him one way or the other. When God prunes us, He is pruning off those handles that give Satan a hold and keep us from being as fruitful as we could. Those holds are sap-draining issues we've allowed into our life. Maybe we abuse alcohol or drugs and it needs to be pruned off. Maybe it's pornography or lust. Maybe it's gossip or unforgiveness. Maybe it's a "me first" spirit of selfishness or anger. We can go along for a while with it, but those suckers will become the dominant branch if given enough time. If we are in the vine, the Vinedresser will prune us. Is there a shoot that needs to be pruned off of your life? Take it to the Vinedresser and ask Him to take His knife to it. (James 1:21) The next verse tells us how.

³ *You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.* Jesus didn't want His disciples to wonder if they were about to be lopped off. The one that was not clean had already left. He was already cut away. The disciples had been pruned by God through the words of Jesus. This doesn't mean they were perfect, but that what needed to be pruned at that point in their lives was cut off. Pruning is a lifelong process and often very painful, but it is always productive.

The word here for clean is the same root as pruned (*katharos* and *kathairo*). We get the word catharsis from this Greek word. Catharsis is defined as any extreme change in emotion, resulting in restoration, renewal and revitalization. Greek philosophers used the word to mean the release of pent up emotion that resulted in emotional cleansing, often from watching Greek theater. For Jesus, the use of the word had a much greater meaning, the purification of life that conforms to God's holiness, the lopping off of those growths 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 as the revelation from God for what is best for us. (Deuteronomy 4:40) Is the Word of God doing its pruning work in your life?

⁴ *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.* Pruning that which robs us is essential, but even more so is to stay connected. Jesus just told them that He is in the Father and we are in Him and He is in us. 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." -ESV Study Bible

The great ministers of God that bore so much fruit that their names are readily recognizable had one thing in common. They all got up early each morning to spend time alone with God in prayer and the Word. Would you say your daily relationship with God is one of trust, prayer, obedience and joy? Is your life really entrusted to the hands of your Maker? Are you constantly looking to Him, remaining in Him, living in Him?

The Greek here is difficult to translate. *and I will remain in you* is literally *and I in you*. There is no explicit verb. It is probably implying that we should remain in Him and see that He remains in us. It's an abbreviated way to say, "Be consistent in our

Commented [notes10]: 30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, John 14:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. James 1:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 40 Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time. Deut 4:40 (NIV)

relationship so that I can continue fully in you." For those of us who have come to love Him, we can think of nothing better than for Him to be fully in us.

To be in or among His people was nothing new. It was the language of the Old Testament covenant. (Leviticus 26:11-12) But it is also the prediction of the New Covenant, (Ezekiel 37:27-28) in which the prophets predicted the Lord would live in/among His people. Jesus is saying that day had come.

It's 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. 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 each and 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 and every fruit and how it transforms us and those with whom we come in contact. That has always been God's desire for His people, fruitfulness.

Jesus reiterates, ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. This is basically what Jesus said about His relationship with God. He relied on the Father for everything. He didn't act without the Father. (John 14:31) He knows that man without God can accomplish nothing of lasting meaning and value. So 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. That is the only way to produce spiritual fruit.

For those of you older saints, I'd like you to consider this. We get so used to bearing fruit that we begin to think that we are pretty special. We gradually disconnect by looking to our own strength and start to dry up and wonder what happened. God is just reminding us that it is all Him. Without Him we can do nothing! Every Sunday I know that if I go into this pulpit alone, it will be a disaster. Realizing that is true for whatever we do will make us pray in earnest and keep our attitude as it should be.

⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 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 pretty cool 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

Commented [notes13]: 11 I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you.
12 I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.
Lev 26:11-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 27 My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.
28 Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever."
Ezek 37:27-28 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 8 The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds.
Num 17:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 10 The LORD said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die."
Num 17:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit.
Isaiah 27:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 4 "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.
5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots;
6 his young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.
7 Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.
8 O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me."
Hosea 14:4-8 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 31 but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave.
John 14:31 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, how is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest? 3 Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on? 4 And after it is thrown on the fire as fuel and the fire burns both ends and chars the middle, is it then useful for anything? 5 If it was not useful for anything when it was whole, how much less can it be made into something useful when the fire has burned it and it is charred? 6 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: As I have given the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest as fuel for the fire, so will I treat the people living in Jerusalem. 7 I will set my face aga... [1]

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? Don't they want the fruit of the Spirit? Who doesn't 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 life. It's 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.

⁷ *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.* That is because 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 aren't 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.

⁸ *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.* 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. That is the evidence that we are Jesus' disciples, a fruitful life. We are what God always intended His people to be and that glorifies Him because people see His heart for mankind. (Exodus 19:6)

Is that what others see in you? Is your life bearing fruit and bringing glory to God? Are you truly in the vine, a disciple of Jesus? If not, you can be grafted in today. (Romans 11:17) That's God's desire for you, but you have to first have a willingness to disconnect from the sap that flows from this present evil world. (1Peter 2:1-2) You have to recognize how deceitful and destructive it is and turn away from it.

If you have been in the vine, has there been a disconnection from that living, vital relationship with the Savior? Perhaps you need it renewed this morning. My wife has a few branches of a special pear tree that she got from her brother. They were cut off that tree and we brought them home and grafted them into the stock of another pear tree. If we waited too long, those cuttings would only be good for kindling, instead of the sweet fruit God intended for them to bear. Don't let that happen to your life. Remain in the vine. Let the sap of the Spirit flow freely each and every day. Let the Word prune you on a regular basis. Glorify God with your abundant fruitfulness. That is a life worth living! It's a life that is truly rich and free. (John 10:10) It's a life without regret or the load of guilt. It's a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Who in their right mind would want to live any other way?

Commented [notes21]: James 4:3 (NIV)
3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Commented [notes22]: Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)
12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Commented [notes23]: 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."
Ex 19:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,
Romans 11:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.
2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,
1 Peter 2:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
John 10:10 (NIV)

1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, how is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest? 3 Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on? 4 And after it is thrown on the fire as fuel and the fire burns both ends and chars the middle, is it then useful for anything? 5 If it was not useful for anything when it was whole, how much less can it be made into something useful when the fire has burned it and it is charred? 6 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: As I have given the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest as fuel for the fire, so will I treat the people living in Jerusalem. 7 I will set my face against them. Although they have come out of the fire, the fire will yet consume them. And when I set my face against them, you will know that I am the LORD. 8 I will make the land desolate because they have been unfaithful, declares the Sovereign LORD."
Ezek 15:1-8 (NIV)