

John Chapter 15: v. 1-17 – Jesus is the true vine.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

<sup>5</sup> “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

<sup>11</sup> “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. <sup>12</sup> This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, that you love one another.

### Introduction

So far in the “Upper Room” conversation between Jesus and His disciples there has been a number of questions. These questions were asked by Jesus’ Disciples. They were questions relating to the impending departure of Jesus.

Jesus taught the disciples things that would encourage them about their future together in heaven. He taught them about what His future would achieve for them.

Last week we learnt about the importance of the Holy Spirit as the “Comforter”, the “Truth” and the giver of “God’s Peace”. Jesus would need to go away to heaven before the Holy Spirit could be given to the disciples.

The big thing we learnt was that the Holy Spirit would replace Jesus but He would be exactly the same as Jesus. Although Jesus taught the disciples what His departure would achieve for them, He hadn’t yet told them how they should be living in the meantime.

In John chapters 15-17 Jesus explains that the most important thing in this life is to

### “Remain in Him”

There are 4 parts to the teaching of Jesus on how to remain in Him and we will be uncovering them over the next 4 weeks.

Part one is John 15: v. 1-17.

Old Testament Background

Because Jesus introduces Himself as the true vine of Israel it is important that we get some Old Testament background on the subject.

There are a number of Old Testament references to the vine. First let us turn to Psalm 80: v.8-19. (Read it in N.L.T.) Now turn to Isaiah 5: v. 1-7. (Read in the N.L.T.)

Psalm 80: v.8-19

<sup>8</sup>You brought us from Egypt like a grapevine;  
you drove away the pagan nations and transplanted us into your land.

<sup>9</sup>You cleared the ground for us,  
and we took root and filled the land.

<sup>10</sup>Our shade covered the mountains;  
our branches covered the mighty cedars.

<sup>11</sup>We spread our branches west to the Mediterranean Sea;  
our shoots spread east to the Euphrates River.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>12</sup>But now, why have you broken down our walls  
so that all who pass by may steal our fruit?

<sup>13</sup>The wild boar from the forest devours it,  
and the wild animals feed on it.

<sup>14</sup>Come back, we beg you, O God of Heaven's Armies.  
Look down from heaven and see our plight.

Take care of this grapevine

<sup>15</sup> that you yourself have planted,  
this son you have raised for yourself.

<sup>16</sup>For we are chopped up and burned by our enemies.  
May they perish at the sight of your frown.

<sup>17</sup>Strengthen the man you love,  
the son of your choice.

<sup>18</sup>Then we will never abandon you again.  
Revive us so we can call on your name once more.

<sup>19</sup>Turn us again to yourself, O LORD God of Heaven's Armies.  
Make your face shine down upon us.  
Only then will we be saved.

Isaiah 5: v. 1-7

Now I will sing for the one I love  
a song about his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard  
on a rich and fertile hill.

<sup>2</sup>He plowed the land, cleared its stones,  
and planted it with the best vines.

In the middle he built a watchtower  
and carved a winepress in the nearby rocks.

Then he waited for a harvest of sweet grapes,  
but the grapes that grew were bitter.

<sup>3</sup>Now, you people of Jerusalem and Judah,  
you judge between me and my vineyard.

<sup>4</sup>What more could I have done for my vineyard  
that I have not already done?

When I expected sweet grapes,  
why did my vineyard give me bitter grapes?

<sup>5</sup> Now let me tell you  
what I will do to my vineyard:

I will tear down its hedges  
and let it be destroyed.

I will break down its walls  
and let the animals trample it.

<sup>6</sup> I will make it a wild place  
where the vines are not pruned and the ground is not hoed,  
a place overgrown with briars and thorns.

I will command the clouds  
to drop no rain on it.

<sup>7</sup> The nation of Israel is the vineyard of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

The people of Judah are his pleasant garden.

He expected a crop of justice,  
but instead he found oppression.

He expected to find righteousness,  
but instead he heard cries of violence.

In these Old Testament references God's chosen people are described as a "Vine". In each case the people are seen as fruitless and unfaithful. There are also warnings of judgment to come to these people. However in Psalm 80: v.17-18, and Isaiah 27 v. 2-6 the writers look forward to a day in the future when the vine will be fruitful.

The vine had become the symbol of the nation of Israel. A golden vine was part of the decoration in Herod's Temple. The "Grapevine" was part of the everyday culture of the Jewish nation. Everybody knew what a grapevine looked like and many people understood the agricultural lessons that Jesus was about to draw on.

Jesus is now claiming to have fulfilled the prophecy as the "Fruitful Vine".

1. Jesus is the true fruit bearing vine. V. 1-2.

In verses 1 Jesus is introducing Himself as the true fruitful vine of Israel. Jesus is claiming that all other religions are false and He is the only true one.

He is going to accomplish all that God's people failed to bring about in the Old Testament.

In Isaiah 5: v. 4 God tells us that everything possible was done for the nation of Israel, but it was not fruitful.

However Jesus states that He is the one that people need to join with in order to be "Fruitful".

Jesus immediately states that He is not operating on His own. He states that His "Father" is the "Vinedresser".

The question arises here, what is a "Vinedresser?"

Well the "Vinedresser" is the most important person in the fruit bearing and ultimately the wine making process. He stays with his vines for decades, usually a lifetime. He knows the individual needs of each vine and works hard to provide for them.

Although in our modern world today, technology has changed and new techniques have developed, the responsibility of the “Vinedresser” has not changed. He is responsible for the weekly monitoring of the grapes, water status, health, and weekly pest and disease control, fertilization and ultimately the harvest of the fruit.

So when Jesus says that His Father is the “Vinedresser”, He is saying that His Father is personally interested in every vine in His vineyard. He takes a personal interest in everybody who is united with the “True Vine”. That means united with Jesus.

So this means that if you are united with Jesus then God has a personal interest in the growth of your spiritual life. He wants you to grow strong and be “Fruitful”.

This is both challenging and encouraging.

The usual practice in the care of vines, is for the branches to be pruned back each year in order to cleanse them. A Vine produces certain shoots called “sucker shoots”, which start to grow where a branch joins the stem. If allowed to grow, they would dissipate the life of the vine. There would be lots of branches but the vine would produce little or no fruit. Instead there would be just lots of leaves.

Every Vinedresser knows that it is important to prune away these little sucker shoots to ensure lots of fruit. Since the shoots grow right where the branch joins the stem, creating a tight cluster where dirt, leaves and other debris collect, the pruning is basically a cleansing process.

The Father’s work in our lives is like the process of the agricultural vine dresser. He finds a branch that is beginning to bear fruit, He then cuts it back. He trims the problem shoots so that we may bare more fruit.

This is not a pleasant process but it is for our own good in the long run. God knows what He is doing, but very often we don’t at the time.

My ways are not your ways says the Lord.

## 2. Disciples of Jesus must remain in the true fruit bearing vine. – v. 3-8.

In these verses Jesus explains the consequences of remaining in the vine and also what happens if we don’t remain in the vine.

The branches are identified as anyone “remaining in Jesus”. Anyone who remains in Jesus will bear fruit. Any branch that is NOT part of the true vine will be unable to bear fruit. It is as simple as that.

The practice of “Fruit Bearing” is what brings glory to God.

In v. 3 we are told the entry point of the vine is to believe in the words of Jesus.

A person joins the vine by hearing the words of Jesus. This includes His words about the cross. It is through the cross, Jesus says, that we are cleansed.

In v. 4 Jesus continues the metaphor to show that remaining in Him is absolutely essential for a person to bear fruit. Jesus tells His disciples that they cannot bear fruit by themselves. They must abide in Jesus and Jesus must be abiding in them.

To “Abide” in Jesus means to continue a daily, personal relationship with Him. This means to “Trust” Him, to “Pray regularly”, to “Obey” His words and His guidance.

In v. 5 Jesus further emphasizes that fruit bearing is guaranteed through Him but impossible without Him. In a moment we are going to discover what that fruit is.

In v. 6 Jesus lays out the consequences of “NOT” abiding in Him. That person is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. These branches are then gathered into a pile and burned. These are very strong words, but they are the words of Jesus.

In v. 7 Jesus focuses upon the positive aspects of remaining in Him and bearing fruit.

It is important that we understand this verse. So far we have learnt that joining the vine and remaining in the vine are dependent upon the words of Jesus. Also we learnt that bearing fruit depends not just on our prayers but it is dependent on the words of Jesus.

In v. 7 two conditions are given for answered prayer. These conditions are abiding in Jesus, and His words abiding in us, as His believers. If we truly abide in Jesus and His words abide in us then we will ask for the things that He wants us to ask for.

Therefore we base our prayers on the words of Jesus and the general teaching of the Bible and not on what we feel or what we particularly want for ourselves.

In v. 8 we discover that “Abiding” in Jesus and “Fruit Bearing” brings glory to God.

It is also a sign that you are a “Disciple of Jesus”. So the purpose of the true vine and its branches is to bring glory to the Father. This fruit will come as a result of prayer.

The question we ask here is “What is this fruit” that is guaranteed when abide in Jesus and His word and pray?

Jesus answers this question as he explains the metaphor in v. 9-17.

### 3. The Vine Metaphor explained v. 9-17.

Jesus’ explanation of how the vine works, and what the images mean, present us with a picture of how God’s true fruitful people are meant to live.

The emphasis here is on our loving obedience to his word and His work. This obedience is the first step to fruitfulness.

Let us look at v. 9-11. What Jesus is saying in these verses is that He loves us in the way that the Father has loved Him.

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. <sup>11</sup> “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

We know from John 5: v. 20 that the Father loved Jesus by showing Him all that He does.

John 5: v. 20

<sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

Jesus loved the disciples in the same way by showing them all things through His words and works. If we read v. 15 it tells us that everything that Jesus has heard from the Father, He has made known to His disciples.

John 15:15

<sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Jesus remained in the Father's love, by loving obedience to what He was shown.

He did this even concerning His death on the cross.

Therefore the disciples of Jesus need to model their life on the life of Jesus. This is by loving obedience to what Jesus shows us in His word, the Bible.

We are told that this kind of obedience leads to "Joy".

Jesus has already taught us that His teaching leads to "Freedom".

John 8: v. 31-32.

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup> And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

So we can have true freedom and joy in our life if we remain in Jesus and lovingly obey His commands.

In v. 12-17 we are taught the nature of Jesus' command.

Jesus has already shown His disciples that obedience to Him means putting self to death in loving service of His people.

Let us look at some of these verses.

John 12:25 ( N.L.T.)

<sup>25</sup> Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity.

John 13: v. 12-17 ( N.L.T.)

<sup>12</sup> After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? <sup>13</sup> You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. <sup>14</sup> And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. <sup>15</sup> I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

Jesus moves from "Servanthood" to friendship to make a point here. He says that a servant does not know what a Master is doing. However Jesus says that obedience to Him makes us "friends". Friends share intimately with each other. Friends of Jesus know everything that God has revealed to Him.

Jesus goes on to say that His disciples are chosen to "Bear Fruit" and that fruit should remain.

The question we need to answer before we finish these verses is what exactly is this fruit?

The clue is found in v. 16. Jesus says to His disciples that they have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.

In the original translation the word used for appointed, means appointed for a particular task or ministry. Since the context of the verse is an appointment to GO and bear fruit, then this suggests Mission.

Jesus wanted their fruit to remain, or abide in some versions. In other words remain in the vine. The point Jesus is making is that He is the true vine and He appoints people and gives them the task of bringing other people in to this vine.

So bearing fruit is bringing souls to Jesus so that they will remain in Him.

This is why the last commandment that Jesus gave His disciples was to actually make disciples by teaching them everything He had taught them.

Quote Matthew 28: v. 16-20. In the N.K.J.

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.

<sup>17</sup> When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore<sup>[c]</sup> and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

Yes it is important that the fruit of the Holy Spirit must be seen in our lives as recorded in Galatians 5v. 22, however in the context of what John is saying here it is clearly the winning of souls for Jesus that is the fruit that God is looking for in our lives.

Are we willing to draw close enough to Jesus in order to be used by Him in the task of winning souls for Jesus?

### Application

The personal application of this passage is a challenge for us to have a "Spiritual Check Up" in our lives. Perhaps once a year you go to the doctor to have a physical check up on your body. He checks to see if you are functioning normally.

Well it is a good idea to have a "Spiritual Check Up with Jesus" to see if you are functioning normally in your Christian life. Are we bearing fruit for God's Glory?

In other words are we seeking to win souls for Jesus? The way to do this is to focus on Jesus and our relationship with Him. He will bring people into our life that we can share the gospel message with. He will guide us to people so that we can interact with them.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of October we will be having our first O.I.C. International Café. We will hold it on the second floor of this building. There will be lots of food, music, an interview with a Christian about their life and a short gospel message. Of course we will need to advertise this event, and invite people to come personally. However I do not want you to concentrate upon this event, I want you to concentrate on your relationship with Jesus. It is not the event as such, however nice it may be that will win souls for Jesus. What will win souls for Jesus is our relationship with Jesus.

If that is razor sharp, He will do a work in other people's hearts to make them willing to come. Jesus will use you at this event to lead people to Himself.

The primary concern of Jesus is not that we lead a happy, healthy, wealthy, and trouble free life. The primary concern of Jesus is that we bear fruit and bring glory to God.

We do this by remaining in Jesus, having a healthy Christian life, obeying His word, following His teaching and being a true disciple. Fruit is a natural result of a good plant and if we are spiritually healthy, fruit will result.

### A Fruit picker tells this true story.

One year the peaches were especially abundant. The fruit was big and juicy. It was one of the best crops in memory. While harvesting the crop, I noticed a branch that had broken off from the tree. Its fruit was rotten and shriveled. The reason it was like this is because it was detached from the tree. It was no longer producing the good fruit that it should.

The same is true of the Christian who ceases to abide in Christ – He ceases to produce good fruit.

Let us all seek to make Jesus the main focus of our Christian lives. To love Him, to spend time with Him, to obey His commands, to love God's people and reach out to a lost world with His love. May God help us to connect with people whose hearts are open to the Gospel message.