

John 15:1-17 – The True Vine

Intro

- Some people have a green thumb (the ability to help a plant grow and thrive)
 - o Here is a picture of the plant on my desk...it's plastic.
 - o The last real plant I had on my desk ended up dead...even though it was a cactus.
- In our passage today Jesus starts with an illustration of a healthy, fruitful grape vine tended by a gardener.
 - o Thankfully for those of us who have the opposite of a green thumb, we are not the gardener in this illustration: that is God's job.
 - o Jesus uses this illustration to talk about our relationship with him.
 - o Remember, we are in the section of the book that could be considered Jesus' farewell address – what he wants the disciples to hold onto once he is no longer visibly, physically present.

(1-11) Abiding in Jesus

(1-2) The Father's Role

- (1) The basic illustration: as the true vine, Jesus (God the Son) is the only source of true life.
 - o This is a point that he has made throughout the Gospel of John.
 - Living water in 4:14
 - The bread of life in 6:35
 - Giving life abundantly (to the full) in 10:10.
 - o God the Father is the gardener caring for the branches of the vine.
 - He makes sure that the branches (people) have what they need.
 - He helps the branches accomplish their purpose – producing fruit.
- (2a) A branch that is completely incapable of bearing fruit is deadwood that has no true life-giving connection to the vine, so he breaks it off.
 - o This would be a person who claims to have a connection with Jesus, but their supposed faith makes no real difference in their life – there is no fruit.
 - They may believe certain things *about* Jesus, but they don't trust him.
 - They may talk and act a certain way around Christians to make a good impression, but it is basically an act.
 - o This is the kind of belief that even Satan and his demons have (James 2:19).
 - They can look and act very appealing (angels of light – 2 Corinthians 11:14).
 - They believe that there is one God and that Jesus is God the Son, but it does them no good because they have rejected a relationship with God.
 - o A person who has this kind of belief is eventually shown for who they are (they will be broken off and discarded by the gardener).

- Either they'll get tired of pretending to be something they're not and decide to chuck it all and live for themselves (Judas Iscariot, 1 John 2:19)...
 - ...Or on judgment day they will claim to have done great things for Jesus only for him to tell them "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23).
- (2b) When a branch bears fruit, the Father helps it produce even more fruit...by pruning it.
 - The word used for *prune* also has the meaning of *cleanse* or *purify*.
 - When you prune a branch, you cut parts of it off to make it healthier.
 - When our Father works with us to make us more fruitful, it isn't always pleasant at the moment, but we know it is for our good. It can include:
 - Giving us a painful awareness of unconfessed sin in our life (Psalm 32:3-4 – part of a Psalm about the joy of receiving God's forgiveness).
 - Disciplining us if we continue to live in sin (Hebrews 12:6 – God loves us too much to let us continue on a destructive path without intervening).
 - Allowing difficult circumstances into our life to help us grow in spiritual maturity (James 1:2-4).

(3-8) Our Reliance

- I had originally called this section *Our Responsibility*, but that really misses the point – verses 3-8 are about how we cannot produce anything good on our own.
- (3) Jesus reminds his followers that they are already clean.
 - This is a play on words from the last verse where pruning has the same root word as cleansing.
 - Those who trust Jesus' words about who he is (the Son of God who saves us from our sins when we trust in him) are already in a right standing with God.
 - The additionally "pruning" helps bring our thoughts & actions more in line with the new life we have in Christ.
- (4-5) Just like a branch draws its life and fruitfulness from the vine, it is our ongoing relationship with Jesus (remaining in him) that enables us to do things that are truly good.
 - He lives within us through his Holy Spirit who fully identifies us with him and produces fruit in our lives.
 - When our relationship with Jesus is the most important thing in our life, that is when our life produces character traits, thoughts, actions, and results that glorify God.
 - He will tell us what that looks like in a minute, but first he issues another warning.
- (6) Jesus reiterates something he has already said several different ways: that a person who claims to belong to him but abandons him will face God's judgment.
 - Maybe they completely abandon any claim to be a Christian, showing it to have been just words (for the sake of fitting in or pleasing someone or getting something).

- Maybe they still claim to be a Christian, but they live their life based on things like “being true to myself” and “doing what feels right” rather than on new life in Christ.
 - Their primary guides in life are things like social media influencers, political commentators, self-help gurus, spiritual mystics, or just their own sense of what is reasonable.
 - Jesus may be one source of wisdom & comfort, but anything he says gets vetoed or radically reinterpreted if it conflicts with personal beliefs/desires.
 - Jesus may be misused as a figurehead to lend credibility to what they already believe & desire, but he is not the source of their beliefs and desires.
 - That is the opposite of abiding in Jesus; It is trying to use Jesus as an add-on to my self-directed life rather than as the source of my life, and Jesus will have none of it.
- (7-8) Jesus describes the fruitful life of abiding/remaining as an ongoing relationship that shapes who we are as we hear from God in his Word and talk to God in prayer.
- Don’t take what Jesus says about prayer out of context: it is not a blank check or a promise that turns God into our very own wish-granting genie.
 - When Jesus is at the center of our life and we are learning from and applying his Word, that relationship will shape our desires so that the things we ask for are according to the will of God.
 - God’s will for us is to be fruitful Christians, so the things that make a fruitful Christian life are the things that we should be praying for the most. For example:
 - Wisdom in difficult circumstances (James 1:5)
 - Opportunities & boldness in witnessing (Ephesians 6:18-19)
 - A greater understanding, experience, and reflection of the love of God (Ephesians 1:16-19)

(9-11) The Results

- (9-10) Our loving, ongoing relationship with Jesus results in obedience to his commands.
- It is not that he keeps loving us only as long as we keep obeying.
 - He loved us even when we were his enemies (Romans 5:8).
 - Our faith and our place in his love are maintained by his grace and power, not our own effort (1 Peter 1:3-5).
 - Jesus is expressing that our love naturally produces obedience to his commands.
 - Just like the love between God the Father and God the Son means that God the Son submits to the will of God the Father.
 - We don’t obey perfectly yet, but we do have the desire to please him and make a genuine self-disciplined effort to obey him because we love him.
 - There is no such thing as being a follower of Jesus and having no desire to follow his commands (the very idea makes no sense).
- (11) The result of loving obedience is true joy.
- It brings Jesus joy, which brings us joy.

- Some preachers make a big deal about the difference between joy and happiness, but the truth is that the Bible uses words like happiness, gladness, blessedness, and joy virtually interchangeably (e.g. Matthew 5:11-12).
- What matters is where we find our pleasure, not which word we use to describe it.
 - The rules, commands, and principles of God's Word are there because if we follow them we will have the life that our perfectly loving heavenly Father designed us to have.
 - Pleasures that comes from living outside those boundaries are fleeting, incomplete, and harmful.
 - True joy comes when we live how we were created to live.
- Jesus goes on to further describe this relationship of loving, joyful obedience.

(12-17) Loving Relationship

(12-13) His Command

- (12) Jesus summarizes the point of all of Gods' commands and guidelines in one command: Love each other as I have loved you.
 - This is repeated over and over in the New Testament.
 - It is the summary of all other commands and the true demonstration of love for God.
- (13) This is self-sacrificing love: the love that puts someone else's good ahead of your own even to the point of death.
 - Most people seldom, if ever, find themselves in a situation where they literally have to put their life on the line for someone else.
 - In everyday life this means treating others how we would want to be treated even when it costs us something...usually something less precious than our life (time, money, forgiveness, rights, etc.).
 - In this, Jesus is our ultimate example in that he did lay down his life for us even while we were enemies to make us his friends (i.e. his loved ones).

(14-17) Our Relationship

- (14-15) Even though he is the God of the universe, Jesus treats his followers as his beloved friends rather than slaves.
 - We obey him because we love him and trust his love for us, but he does not keep us in the dark.
 - It is not the kind of obedience described in *Charge of the Light Brigade*: "Theirs not to make reply / Theirs not to reason why / Theirs but to do and die:" (Tennyson)
 - We are taken into God's confidence and told a large part of his plan for the world.
 - Obviously, he doesn't tell us everything since that would be beyond our comprehension (and might lead us to needless anxiety).

- But we live in a time what God has revealed through Jesus Christ the whole sweep of redemption's story: the fall, the cross, the resurrection, the return of Christ, and the glorious eternity that is coming.
 - We have the Holy Spirit to help us understand God's Word in a way that applies it to our life and brings forth fruit that is pleasing to him.
- (16a) Lest we become proud, we are reminded that we have this relationship because God chose us.
 - Jesus is speaking most directly to the 11 disciples, but according to his inspired Word this applies to all believers (*cf.* Ephesians 1:3-5).
 - If you are saved it is because God chose you and drew you to himself in such a way that you responded by putting your faith in Jesus Christ (*cf.* John 6:44).
 - "But what about free will?"
 - I don't know exactly how God's sovereign choice and human responsibility work together.
 - I know that every saved person can say "the God of the universe chose to have a relationship with me" and that's awesome!
- (16b) One of the results of that relationship is fruit that has eternal consequences.
 - We pray in the name of Jesus (as if Jesus himself were making the request) and God freely gives us what we ask for...
 - ...when it's something Jesus would actually ask for.
 - Sometimes we ask for something that is not good for us in the long run or just plain selfish and the answer is "I have a better plan."
 - We know that we *will* receive what we need to bring forth fruit.
 - Fruit can come in many varieties. For example:
 - Godly character traits & motivations (Galatians 5:22-23)
 - Thoughts and actions that are wise & righteous (Philippians 1:9-11)
 - Heartfelt praise to God (Hebrews 13:15)
 - Salvation of others through our witness (Romans 1:13)
- (17) Before moving on to the world that hates Christians (which we will look at in two weeks) Jesus once again reminds them to love one another.
 - With how often Jesus says this, I think we can assume it is of great importance.
 - I know that some Christians today think that if you talk about the love of God a lot you must be soft on sin...a bit of a compromiser who ignores the holiness of God.
 - The persistence with which Jesus, the holy Son of God, insists on love (for one another, for our neighbor, for our enemies) shows that to be a grave misunderstanding.

- Love and holiness are not opposed to one another as if you have to pick one; as if holiness gives permission to ignore the command to treat others how we would want to be treated and instead be uncaring, harsh, and merciless.
- Self-sacrificing love is a crucial part of living a holy life: a life set apart to God and reflecting his character – a life that produces fruit that remains.

Applications

- Are you a fruitful branch?
 - Have you trusted in Jesus to give you new life?
 - Is your relationship with Jesus an important enough part of your life that your love for him results in truly good attitudes, thoughts, and actions of eternal value?
 - I know there were a lot of different things in this passage, so let me give you two applications on which to focus:
- Pray for the things that will help you be truly fruitful
 - Don't use prayer as nothing but a health hotline (praying for the physical needs of others *is* good, but should not be the only thing we pray about).
 - Wisdom in difficult situations
 - Making decisions
 - Enduring extended hardship
 - Being a comfort & encouragement to others
 - Boldness & opportunity to witness (whether a full Gospel presentation or planting seeds by talking about things of spiritual value).
 - Means & opportunity to help others
- As you interact with others, keep in mind Jesus' primary command: Love one another.
 - I encourage you this week to write or print out these two verses and put them somewhere you will see them multiple times per day – John 15:12 & Matthew 7:12
 - An index card, your phone's background, your computer's wallpaper, etc.
 - Those who love Jesus obey Jesus, and this is Jesus' command that he repeats over and over for his disciples.