

Message

Attached to the Vine

Jesus often used word pictures or parables when he was teaching his disciples. Painting a picture in their minds seems to have helped them grasp the concepts He was trying to teach. And they help us as well.

The night that Jesus was betrayed and handed over to the Jews and then to the Romans, he joined his disciples for the Passover meal. They ate the meal and following the meal, Jesus spent time with His followers, preparing them for when He would be gone from them. Jesus knew that He would soon be returning to His place in heaven. John, in his gospel, records the teaching that Jesus gave to his followers after the supper. That teaching is recorded in John 13 – 17. There is much here to help us in our lives as disciples. Jesus desired that **after He was gone**, His followers would carry on the work that He had begun, that they would be effective witnesses for Him. And His desire is that **we too would be effective disciples and witnesses** for Him. So we would do well to study these chapters. In these chapters we learn that Jesus wants His followers to know how they should conduct their lives **after He is gone**. He wants them to know that loving one another and serving one another must characterize their lives **after He is gone**. He does not want His followers to be controlled by fear of the enemy **after He is gone**, but to live victoriously. He wants them to know about the gift of the Holy Spirit that He will send **after He is gone**.

In chapter 15 of this section of John's gospel, Jesus uses a word picture to help his followers. I want to spend some time looking at this chapter over the next few weeks.

Read Scripture

John 15:1-8

Today, I want to introduce us to the parable, to the characters involved. We will be looking primarily at verses 1-4. In the last verse of chapter 14 Jesus says, "Come now, let us leave." They had been gathered in the Upper Room for the meal. Now Jesus' plan was to go to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus found that Garden to be a place of solitude where He was able to rest and to pray. As they walked to the Garden, Jesus continues to teach. On their journey they may have walked past the Temple. On the front of the Temple was attached a sculpted golden vine, the national emblem of Israel. In Psalm 80:8-9, the Psalmist writes: "**You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it and it took root and filled the land.**" As they looked at the vine on the Temple, perhaps the disciples would have remembered the verses that referred to Israel as the vine. Perhaps Jesus draws their attention to the vine on the Temple when He tells them the parable. "**I am the true vine....**" Jesus emphasizes that He is the TRUE vine. Israel had failed in their role as the Vine. Isaiah writes:

Isaiah 5:1-2, 7

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

**My loved one had a vineyard
on a fertile hillside.**

**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.**

**⁷The vineyard of the LORD Almighty
is the nation of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are the vines he delighted in.**

***And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.***

God had made Israel His Vineyard, expecting to find fruit that would bring Him glory. But instead of the fruit of righteous behavior, God had instead found sin and disobedience. Jesus now emphasizes that HE is the True Vine. He replaces Israel as the Vine of God. In this first paragraph, Jesus introduces the Word Picture that He is painting for the disciples.

We want to look at the characters who are present in the story. **First of all – the Vine.** Jesus is the Vine. He is the True Vine. Vines provide shade for those who wish to escape from the heat. Vines produce fruit for others to enjoy. Contrasted with the nation of Israel who did not produce good fruit, Jesus has come to produce fruit for the Gardener. Studying the image of the Vine we learn much about who Jesus is and what His mission in the world was.

The second character in the story is the **Gardener.** It is the Gardener who plants the Vine. And He plants the vine for a purpose. **He plants to vine to produce fruit.** The vine is dependent on the Gardener. Jesus is not independent from the Father. Just as the vine depends on the work of the Gardener in order to fulfill His purpose, so Jesus is dependent on the Father. Throughout His ministry, Jesus emphasizes that He and the Father are One. That He has come to do the Father's will. The work of the Gardener is intended to make the vine productive. Jesus mentions 2 tasks that the Gardener performs in order for the vine to produce fruit. Jesus says that the Gardener "**Cuts Off**" branches that bear no fruit. A dead branch on a vine can inhibit the health of the vine. A dead branch can become a source of disease. And so Dead Branches must be removed. Any branch this is a threat to the health of the vine must be cut off. Secondly the Gardener **prunes.** It is a different word than the first one. Dead branches are **cut off** to be burned. **Pruning** is to clean what is producing. A healthy and productive branch must be trimmed back to keep it from growing out of control and becoming unproductive.

Now, the third character that Jesus refers to in the story is initially identified as **YOU** (vs. 3). He will later identify the "You" as branches. **The branches are the followers of Jesus.** As Jesus refers to the pruning work of the Father, we understand that the work of pruning is to clean the vine. He then says that YOU are clean. God has been pruning or cleaning the lives of the disciples through the teaching of Jesus. He has been teaching them about God and the Kingdom of God. He has taught them about righteous behavior that is expected from those who have followed Him. As we listen to His word and respond to His word, He cleanses our life from sin. That is an important point in following Jesus. **Jesus expects that those who hear His words will respond and turn from evil.** We can't just listen to what Jesus says and nod our heads in agreement, and then go on and live the way we have always lived.

There are some important points to note about those who will be identified as Branches. Andrew Murray in his little devotional book on this parable makes this observation about branches: ***A branch is simply a bit of wood, brought forth by the vine for the one purpose of serving it in bearing its fruit. It is of the very same nature as the vine and has one life and one spirit with it.*** As followers of Jesus we are to be transformed into the nature of Jesus. We are one with Him. Just as Jesus cannot act independently of the Father, as followers of Jesus we cannot act independent of Him. We have one purpose as a branch. We are to be a branch. Through our faith in Jesus, we are connected to Jesus. His Spirit dwells within us. And we exist for one purpose – to produce fruit for the vine..

Jesus concludes this first paragraph by emphasizing how a branch can bear fruit. ***"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."*** A branch receives the life-giving sap which makes it able to produce fruit by staying attached to the Vine.

We are going to come back to this parable next week and further develop some of the ideas that we have been introduced to today. What is Jesus referring to when he talks about Fruit? What does it mean to Remain in Him? How does the Gardener Prune the branches?

But let me make a few observations for us to think about as we look ahead to the next study:

- The Gardener cleans the vine, by lopping off what is not productive, what is dead. **Question: Am I “dead wood” that is putting the health of the Church at risk?**
- The Gardener cleans the branches by pruning them – cutting them back so they will continue to produce. **Question: What needs to be cut out of my life, or eliminated from my life in order for me to be more fully devoted to the task for which I exist – to produce fruit?**
- The branch must be securely attached to the vine to produce fruit? **Question: What am I doing to make sure I REMAIN in the vine?**

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have one purpose – to produce fruit.