

Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

## Jesus Is the True Vine

### John 15:1-11 (ESV)

"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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <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. <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. <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. <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. <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. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I 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 be in you, and that your joy may be full."

This past weekend was our annual elders retreat.

- This is HCC's 20th year. We will mark this year this coming September but save a larger celebration for year 25.
- Dave Chamberlain shared his desire to finish well. When the end is in sight, it forces you to think hard about what you spend your time on and pour your energies into.
- For many reasons we sense that we are at an inflection point in the life of Hope Church. We need to once again reconsider what we do, how we do it, and why we do it.
- We like our mission statement, vision, and our core values. Our purposes are biblical and will remain the same—reaching up, reaching in, and reaching out.
- But we sense the Lord inviting us to rethink. In this 20th year, in programing terms, what might Hope 2.0 look like. Our core will not change, our message will not change, the gospel will remain the same, but we may need to change a few other things in order to be as fruitful for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord as we can.
- We will share more with you in the weeks to come as we sit with these notions and pray through them.

- Our greatest need in these days is not creativity, but connectivity—to be fruitful we need to be connected to true vine, to Jesus. Creativity is good and we need to employ it, but our deepest and greatest need is to be connected to Jesus, to abide in Him.

## Introduction

Anyone who takes seriously the teachings of the Bible knows that Jesus often made some amazing claims. He taught with vivid clarity. John 15:1-11 is one such example. Let me summarize what Jesus says. Here is a summary of what Jesus said.

I am the true vine.

Branches cannot bear fruit unless they abide in the vine.

You are the branches.

Apart from me you cannot bear fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.

Branches that do not bear fruit are burned.

Therefore, abide in me so that your prayers will be answered, so that you will bear much fruit and thereby glorify the Father.

So what is our greatest need today? What is Hope church's deepest need in this hour? It is that we abide in Jesus. If we are to be a fruitful church, then what we most need to drink deeply from this truth. If we are to be fruitful people, then we had better figure out what this means. Figuring this out and applying this truth will take much more than a 40 minute sermon.

## Context

Jesus spoke these words to the eleven disciples<sup>1</sup> on the night before his crucifixion. He spoke them as they were walking through the Jerusalem night air having just left the room where they had shared the Last Supper and on their way across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas had already left them and was at that very moment these words were being spoken in the act of betraying Jesus. These words are among his final words to his disciples just before his death.

## Jesus Is the True Vine?

The question then arises, 'What did Jesus mean that he was the true vine?' When someone talks like this, you can't help but wonder against what is he comparing himself. To claim that one is the 'true' vine, makes you think about whatever might be the 'false' vine.

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<sup>1</sup> Judas had already departed to betray Jesus (Jn 13:26-30).

If I sense the need to say that I am the *true* father of my three children, then perhaps a *false* father has made the claim that he is the father of my three children. If Jesus is claiming to be the *true* vine, then who was falsely making the same claim?

In Psalm 80 Israel is referred to as a vine which God brought up out of Egypt and planted in the land (v.8). This notion of Israel as a vine is referenced many times in the OT.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly among these passages is probably **Isaiah 5:1-7**.

The Isaiah passage pictures Israel as a vineyard which God cared for personally by planting, cultivating, and protecting it. The LORD looked for it to yield good, sweet grapes but instead it yielded bad, wild grapes. Because of this bad harvest, the LORD tore down its walls, removed its protection, and allowed the vineyard to be trampled upon and overgrown by briars and thorns.

**Isaiah 5:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the men of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
and he looked for justice,  
but behold, bloodshed  
for righteousness,  
but behold, an outcry [of distress].

Israel was a vine that the Lord Himself planted, but Israel failed to produce the kind of fruit for which God was looking. **God is interested in fruitfulness. He expects His people to bear good fruit.** The fruit for which He was looking was justice and righteousness and what He found was murder and cries of distress. Nothing changed from the days of Isaiah down to the days of Jesus.

The Jewish religious leaders of the day claimed to be rightly leading the nation and they claimed to be the true shepherds of the people but yet they had opposed Jesus at every turn. Jesus once said to the chief priests and the Pharisees,

**Matthew 21:43 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

By claiming to be the true vine Jesus was placing himself in a unique place of authority over against the religious leaders of his day. **He was claiming to be the true Son of God who was**

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<sup>2</sup> Jer 2:21; 6:8-9; Ez 17:6-8; 19:10-14; Ho 10:1-2.

**producing the kind of fruit for which God was looking.** It was *his* kingdom that would establish “justice and righteousness” (Is 9:7). Even his own enemies testified to his ability to judge rightly and not be wrongly influenced by the opinions of men (Mt 22:16; Mk 12:14).

Jesus was claiming to be the unique one with whom God the Father was pleased. He was the true Savior of Israel. He was the true redeemer. He was the true spiritual leader of the nation. He was the true messiah. He was the true Son of God. He was the true shepherd of Israel among many false shepherds who cared nothing for the sheep but only for themselves.

Jesus is the original and true source of all spiritual life and nourishment for all needy souls. Jesus was and is the true vine. Jesus alone produced all the fruit the pleased God the Father. Therefore, all who yearn to please the Father must go to Jesus as the source of all spiritual nourishment and sustenance. Apart from him no one can produce any fruit pleasing to God the Father. Without His life coursing through us, we produce nothing righteous.

### God Expects Fruitfulness (v.2)

One thing is abundantly clear from these verses and that is that **God expects fruitfulness.** Jesus’ teaching is clear. The vinedresser cultivates a vineyard in order to produce grapes. God the Father is the vinedresser and He sees to it that **every branch bears fruit** (v.2).

Notice the emphasis upon ‘every’ branch in verse 2. He will not abide a fruitless branch. Every branch that does not bear fruit **he takes it away.** And every branch that does bear fruit He prunes in order that they may bear **more** fruit. What’s the point? The point is that God the Father expects fruitfulness and he will not abide fruitlessness. He is looking for fruitfulness.

### The Peril of Fruitlessness

Many find verse two to be troubling. It is troubling because it says,

John 15:2 (ESV)

“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away...”

In verse 5 Jesus tells us that the branches refer to disciples. Those branches who do not abide in Jesus, are the ones that are ‘taken away,’ end up being “gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (v.6). That sounds like the last judgment.

Some have understood Jesus to be teaching here that it is possible for a disciple of Jesus—who once was “in him”—to be taken away from him, i.e. to lose his salvation and be finally and eternally lost. This is not what Jesus saying and this is not what whole of Scripture teaches.

The context of this passage must be remembered. This clearly refers to Judas who betrayed Jesus. Jesus is helping the Eleven disciples who were presently walking with him understand what has happened to the twelfth disciple who was not. Just a few minutes before speaking

these words, Judas went out into the dark in order to betray Jesus. Judas looked like he was “in” Jesus, and in one sense he was, he was numbered among the disciples of Jesus, but he was never a *true* believer in Jesus. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus said,

John 6:64, (ESV)

<sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)

John 6:70-71, (ESV)

<sup>70</sup> Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” <sup>71</sup> He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.

Judas was not a disciple who had faith and then lost it. He did not possess salvation and then lose his salvation. He never had any faith in Jesus in the first place. He never had possession of salvation at any time. He was a devil. He was a thief (Jn 12:6). Judas was a branch who looked like he was “in Jesus,”<sup>3</sup> but the life of Jesus was never in him. He was with Jesus for a short time, but he did not abide (i.e. remain) in Jesus. Judas did not produce the kind of fruit for which God was looking.

## Abide In Me

So if God expects fruitfulness and desires for his people to bear much fruit, then what is the key to fruitfulness? What must the branches do in order to bear fruit? Jesus gives the answer in verse 4-5 and he illustrates this by pointing to the relationship between a vine and its branches.

John 15:4-5, (ESV)

<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. <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.

Fruitfulness does not flow from creativity, but from connectivity. The branches that bear fruit are the ones that are connected to the vine and abide in the vine. The word ‘abide’ simply means ‘to remain.’ As branches bear no fruit apart from the vine, so disciples bear no fruit apart from Jesus. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing! However, those who do abide in Jesus and he in them, these are the branches that bear **much fruit** (v.5).

So what’s the key to bearing much fruit? The answer is, abiding in Christ.

What does abiding in Christ look like? How do we do that? Uproot and then reroot.

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<sup>3</sup> Jesus is here (Jn 15:2) using the term “in me” in the same way that Paul says in Rom 9:6 that “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (cf. Rom 2:28-29).

## Uproot

The first thing we need to do is to turn away from all false vines and turn to Jesus as the true vine. When Jesus says he is the true vine, I believe that to us, he is saying, "Turn away from all false vines, and turn to me as the true vine." Vines are what keep the branches rooted and continually nourished. Into what are you rooted? From what do you receive nourishment?

What might be some of the false vines to which we may be looking to keep us rooted (i.e. secure) and continually nourished?

A vine is the source of life for the branches. Branches cannot live without a vine to support them. So what is the vine in your life? That which, today, is the vine of your life, is that thing without which you cannot imagine living. Examine your heart right now, and if you find something within that causes you to think, "If I lost \_\_\_\_\_, then my heart would fail and my life would be over," then that is the vine that is right now feeding your soul.

The vine which today is sustaining your soul is that thing you think you most need. If there is something in your life without which contentment would be impossible, then that is the vine that is sustaining you. What can't you get through the day without?

Here's some possible suggestions:

1. The internet - can you imagine life without the internet?
2. TV - Could you live and thrive without TV?
3. News - could you make it through the day without reading the paper or listening to NPR or whatever news outlet you frequent?
4. Education - What if you had no degree?
5. Entertainment - what if the electricity went off and stayed off. Would you be content?
6. Job - what if you lost your job tomorrow? Would your soul remain stable?
7. Wealth - if all financial systems crashed tomorrow...?
8. Sports - can you imagine getting through the day without reading the sports page or checking the scores online?
9. Drugs - can you live without them? [I'm not talking about the ones that are medically necessary?] Could you go to sleep tonight if there was no Ambien?
10. Achievement - if all your trophies and awards were stripped from you, suddenly all seven Tour de France titles are taken away, would your soul still be full? Imagine life without all your accomplishments on your wall or the T-Shirts you received in honor of what you've done?
11. Sex - what sex was no longer a physical possibility for you?

12. Peer recognition - what if none of your peers ever gave you credit for anything?
13. Fame or popularity - what if no one ever sung your praises or ever invited to you speak?
14. Reputation - what if your good reputation was forever slandered and there was nothing you or reputation.com could do about it?
15. Family - is your family or extended family your firm foundation & security in life?
16. Children - what would life be like without your children?
17. Spouse - could you continue to live without husband or wife?

Is Jesus important enough to make the list?

If Jesus is the true vine, then he is the true source of true life, true nourishment, and true fruitfulness. If Jesus is the true vine in our lives, then that which we can't imagine getting through the day without, is Him!

Uproot anything that is a false vine in your life. Jesus is the true vine. If you want to thrive and bear fruit for the kingdom of God, then be certain that Jesus is the source and fountain of your life and sustainer of your soul.

## Reroot

After uprooting, then re-root! Reroot our soul into Jesus. Abide in Him. What does abiding in Christ look like? It means you always remain in him. How do we do that?

We do that through reading, praying, and obeying.

## Abide In His Word

First, abide in his word. Look at verse 7.

**John 15:7 (ESV)**

*<sup>7</sup> "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you..."*

Compare verse 7 with verse 4.

**John 15:4 (ESV)**

*<sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you.*

Notice what has been changed. In verse 4 Jesus said, "I [abide] in you." However, in verse 7 Jesus said, "*if my words abide in you.*"

Jesus abides in his people through his words. His words are his teaching. So abiding (i.e. remaining) in Christ means abiding (i.e. remaining) in the teachings of Christ. Abiding in Jesus

means abiding in his words. Where do we find his words? Answer: in the Bible. The least we can say is that Jesus expects his disciples to regularly read his words. So the first way we can abide in Christ, is to *read our Bibles*.

I cannot emphasize this enough. I will say this ten thousand times before I die or you send me away. If you are spiritually weak or your soul is withering, then it is probably because you are not spending time in the word. This book is a feast and we pass it by every day opting instead for sports page or CNN. Taste and see that this book is good! I beg you make time in your life to read your Bible. 15 minutes a day. Just read it 15 minutes a day, alone in the quiet and I promise you that you will feel the sap of God's Spirit begin to stir within you.

"This is no empty word; this word is your very life, and by this word you shall live" (Dt 32:47). You do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3). The reason it is so difficult to remain in God's word is because Satan knows how powerful it is. He will keep you from God's word with every possible means. You must not allow him to succeed. Decide today to have a plan to read your Bible. You won't do it if you don't plan to do it.

## Read Expectantly

Reading is good, but that is not enough. Don't read the Bible like you would read an instruction manual or your new printer. When you read your Bible, read it with expectancy. Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice...*" (Jn 10:27). Read your Bible expecting to hear the voice of Jesus. This book is not a dead book. This book is living words. His words are not dead words, they are living and active (Heb 4:12). He is risen, and he is not silent. He still speaks. Reading your Bible is one of the means through which you can abide in Jesus.

## Abide In Prayer

Reading leads to praying. We see this in verse 7.

**John 15:7 (ESV)**

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

Abiding in Christ happens through prayer. The asking referred to here is prayer. When the words of Jesus are home in your heart the natural result is a conversation. Remaining near someone means you talk to them. You can't have a relationship with someone without ever communicating with them. Part of abiding in Christ is continually talking to him. He has poured out his Spirit within us so he is in us and he has then drawn us into his own life—we are in him. That was last week's sermon.

There is no place that we can go apart from his Spirit (Ps 139:7), so then talk to him always. Set aside dedicated times to spend with him alone. Jesus is our model here. He regularly went



away by himself to be alone and talk to his Father. Yet I am quite certain that he also prayed to him always, both in public and in private.

Notice this crazy invitation to pray *whatever you wish*. If you remain in him and his words remain in you, then pray whatever you want and it will be done for you. That is an amazing invitation to discover what that means. I want to be able to pray this kind of prayers and see them "being done for me." But first I must abide in him and his words abide in me.

Are you ready to pray some crazy bold prayers and watch God answer them? Then lets abide in him and his words in us.

## Abide In Obedience

Reading leads to praying. Praying leads to obeying. One who abides in the teaching of Jesus is one who daily lives in accordance to his teaching. What good is it to read his words or pray to him if you are not going to obey his words.

Abiding in Christ means experiencing his love. Experiencing the love of God comes through obeying Him.

### John 15:9-10, (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I 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.

If you want to know and experience the kind of love that exists between the Father and Son, then start obeying him. Start believing that obeying him carries a greater reward than disobeying.

We need to repent of any and all conscious acts of disobedience in our lives. We need to fall on our faces and repent for our selfish, stubborn, self-seeking ways and ask the Lord to forgive us and turn our hearts toward him. We need to cry out for his mercy in renewing our will to surrender to his will and obey him.

The result of obedience is joy, Jesus' joy.

### John 15:11, (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Is Jesus your true vine. Turn away from any false vines. Are you looking to Jesus to nourish you? Are you crying out to him to satisfy the hunger and thirst of your soul? Pray to him right now. Ask him to satisfy your thirsty, hungry soul.

Are you a Judas-type pretender 'disciple?' Do you need to repent of lack of faith? Tell Jesus you are sorry for not believing in him and then ask him to forgive you and pour out his Spirit within you.

Abide in Jesus.

Read.

Pray.

Obey - in the power of His Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the true vine and all fruitfulness comes from abiding in him. A fruitful life is an abiding life and that is the kind of life that glorifies the Father.