

Growing in Christ, Our True Vine

John 15: 1-11

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I Am The Vine, You Are The Branches

Throughout the book of John, Jesus has been doing one thing over and over again—wooing people back into right relationship to God with His words. One of the ways that Christ does this, which is unique to the book of John, is through seven “I am” statements. “I am the bread of life”—“I am the Good Shepherd”—“I am the door”—“I am the way, the truth and the life”. With each “I am” statement Christ shares, the disciples begin to grow in their understanding, appreciation and experience of who Jesus Christ is.

Today, in John 15, we come to the final “I am” statement. Set against the backdrop of Jesus’ farewell address to His closest friends, you can sense the intimacy behind His words: “I am the vine...you are the branches.” They want to believe this but they are heartbroken at the thought of Jesus’ departure. So He assures their anxious hearts with an allegory—John 15 is Jesus’ way of saying, “You will continue to grow in your understanding, appreciation, and experience of Me after I’m gone. Our relationship is not over, it’s just begun to grow! Make yourself at home in my life, words, and love—you’ll be living in them for all eternity!”

Abide in Me

In the Old Testament, when God spoke about His relationship with Israel, He would often use the metaphor of a vineyard. However, the imagery was always a sharp indictment against His people’s sins. The vineyard has been vandalized (Isaiah 3:14). The grapes are sour (Isaiah 5:1-6). What do you do if you’re the gardener and your entire garden has gone rotten? Do you let it wither away? Do you set it on fire and start over? The point of Jesus’ allegory of the vine and branches is crystal clear—The Heavenly Gardener has not given up on His garden (vs 1). God’s beloved vineyard will overflow with fruit once again. But how? Jesus tells us: “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 a not simply poetic sentiment—it’s a promise! Jesus has come to infuse life back into the withering branches of God’s people. The Christian is the person that says, “Only Jesus can infuse life into me...the things of this world that promise to infuse me with life cannot make good on their promise. I must remain in Jesus’ life every second—He is the True Vine.”

If My Words Abide in You

Although John 15 is extremely poetic, it’s also extremely practical. Jesus tells us how to abide in Him: by making room for His Words in our daily lives—“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (vs 7). The mark of a true follower of Jesus is a willingness to make room for God’s Word. Is there room in your daily life for God’s Word? Abiding in Christ’s Words means that His words find a home in us. They fit. They belong. You move other things around and even get rid of some things so that the word has room and “feels at home.” Only Christ’s Words are sharp enough to prune away lifeless things and powerful enough to grow godly character in our life. As we learn to abide in Christ’s Words, over time we find that God’s power is quietly at work in our lives...cultivating the soil...watering here and there...pruning dead branches...all so that we can be in virtue and vocation what we were meant to be since the Garden of Eden—A Fruitful Branch!

Abide in My Love

Two things usually happen when most of us run into passages like John 15. For many of us, we walk away with great intentions to try harder in the Christian life—we double our efforts to grow into the person God has in mind. Others feel tremendous guilt when they passages like John 15—they imagine themselves as a useless, barren branch that’s about to be burned. If we truly believe Jesus’ words in John 15, we will see that each of these ways are responding to Jesus’ words are wrong! The Christian life is not simply trying harder to produce fruit in order to warrant God’s love! Nor is it a way of life that is infused with feelings of guilt and worthlessness! The Christian life begins and ends in love. Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.” Do you want to experience supernatural energy to obey God’s commands? Remain in Christ’s love! Do you need supernatural power to overcome sin in your life? Remain in Christ’s love! God is most glorified and we are most satisfied when we make ourselves at home in Christ’s Love...as we abide in Christ—our True Vine, growth is in not only possible...it’s inevitable!

For Further Reflection

This week, read John 15:1-11 every day. As you listen and pray, think about the following...

What things in your life would actually enrich your life if you lost them? Ask God to prune these things away to make room for more living things.

How can you make more room in your life for God's Word? One of the practical ways you can do this is by memorizing John 15:1-11 this week. As you do, ask God to nourish you through His Word.

How is abiding in God's love different than trying to warrant His love by producing fruit?