

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JUNE 17TH-18TH, 2023 // GOSPEL OF JOHN

THE VINE & THE BRANCHES (JOHN 15:1-8)

Chapters 15–17 are Jesus' final intimate words to the disciples as they made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

- This was the night Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, and put on trial before being sentenced to death on the cross.
 - Jesus is leaving His disciples with instructions on how to continue the life of discipleship after His death.
- The imagery of vines and branches would have been very familiar to the disciples as Jews.
- In the OT, Israel was regularly depicted as a vine (Ps. 80; Isa. 5; Jer. 2:21), and God was depicted as the owner of that vineyard.
 - A vine's purpose for existing is to bear fruit for its owner, and in the Old Testament, Israel was often rebuked for failing to bear fruit.
- Jesus says that He is the "true vine," meaning that He as the Messiah would bring forth the fruit that Israel had failed to produce (vs. 1).
- The followers of Jesus are simply branches of the true vine. The life source is always Christ.
 - A branch is only alive if the sap flows from the trunk through the branch, and without sap, the branch dies! When we trust in Jesus as Lord, His life flows to us and makes us alive.
- There are two types of "branches" (disciples)—living disciples and dead disciples (vs. 2).
- All true disciples are alive because they're connected to Jesus: we know they're alive because they bear fruit.
 - Dead disciples might hang around Jesus and other true branches, but they don't have a genuine, life-giving relationship with Jesus: they'll eventually be cut off and removed.
- Living disciples that are connected to Jesus are pruned: disciplined, corrected, and trained by God so that they can bear more fruit.
- Pruning hurts! But God's commitment to you bearing fruit is greater than His commitment to your comfort.
 - God is the one who prunes: however, we can make choices to fully surrender to this process or impede it.
- We might go through seasons of drought or barrenness, but ultimately throughout the course of our life, if we're truly in Christ, we should see evidence of Jesus' life at work in us.
- Our responsibility is to "remain/abide" in Jesus (vs. 4): we're to be connected to Him and to live our lives out of our connection with Him.
 - Without living out of this connection with Him, we can't produce any real fruit!
- We can do nothing of real, eternal value for the Kingdom of God without a living, active relational connection with Jesus (vs. 5).
- We can do religious or moral performances, but these things are the "fruit" of our own self-righteousness: they don't honor God, please God, and they don't accomplish God's purposes.
 - Remaining in Him leads to us bearing much fruit.
- People who claim to be Christians but don't show any evidence of Christ's life flowing through them will be cut off, gathered up, and burned (vs. 6).
- Unless there is fruit of Jesus in you, then you'll be cast into the fire of God's eternal judgment.
 - There will be many religious people and self-righteous moralists in Hell.
 - If you have saving faith, Christ's life flows through you, and that should be evidenced by fruit.
- If we remain in Jesus, living our lives connected to Him and His Words as our life source, we can have confidence that He will answer our prayers (vs. 7).
- Staying connected to Jesus changes our desires and priorities: we start to want what He wants for us, and we'll pray His will over our lives.
 - If we're truly abiding in Him, whatever we ask of Him will be done for us.
- Your fruit proves you're a disciple, and your lack of fruit also proves something (vs. 8).
- This verse gives the world the right to inspect our fruit as Jesus followers.
 - Fruitlessness exposes frauds: If you claim to be a Christian, people are always inspecting your fruit, and Jesus Himself gave them the right to do so.
 - A fruitless disciple of Jesus is no disciple at all; they're a dead branch destined for the fire.
- ### HOW DO WE "REMAIN/ABIDE" IN JESUS?
1. Am I truly connected to the vine? Have I put genuine, saving, repentant, obedient and allegiant in Christ alone?
 2. Am I allowing His words to remain in me through daily reading, studying, meditating on, and memorizing Scripture?
 3. Is prayer a life source for me, or an afterthought?
 4. Am I obeying and surrendering to His pruning?
- ### TRUE LOVE (JOHN 15:9-17)
- Just as the Father loves the Son, who was perfect, worthy, holy, and blameless, so Jesus loves us despite all our rebellion, sin, brokenness, and depravity (vs. 9).
- We are to receive this love in faith and to continue, remain, and abide in it daily. Sometimes we need reminding!
 - To remain in Christ's love is to keep God's commands (vs. 10).
- The test to see if we're truly abiding in Christ's love is not if we've had some mystical experience—it's if we're being fully obedient to the commands of God's Word.
- Obedience implies trust, and trust is something necessary in every love relationship.
 - We obey God's Word because we love Him and trust that He loves us and that His commands for us are for our good and His glory.
- The path to joy in the Christian life is through glad, trusting, obedient surrender to Jesus and His version of life for us (vs. 11).
- The Christian life isn't supposed to be a shallow, cold, stale, and ritualistic following of a set of behavioral practices.
 - It's to be a life of unspeakable joy and soul-satisfying peace and love that comes about through glad-hearted surrender!

One of the fruits that Jesus' life produces in us is that we have a newfound capacity for sacrificial love (vs. 12–13).

- Why are we able to love like never before? Because it's actually Christ's love for humanity that now flows through us: the kind of love that laid down His life for us on the cross.
 - This is no greater love than this kind of love: the kind that lays down its life.
- The greatest love of all time is not romantic or erotic: it's sacrificial.
- Sacrifice is being willing to suffer and go without something for the good of someone else.
 - If we are truly in Christ, this is the kind of love that we display for other people.
 - If we obey Christ's commands and love others like this, we enjoy friendship (intimacy and disclosure) with Him (vs. 14–15; Ps. 25:14).
- Jesus reminds His disciples of His great love for them in that He chose them; they didn't choose Him (vs. 16).
- If you're a Christian, God set His love on you, chose you to be His, and saved and redeemed you: He chose you, saved you, and appointed you to bear fruit (Eph. 1:4; Eph. 2:10).
 - This is God's will for every disciple of Jesus: eternal, lasting impact for God's Kingdom.
- The fruit that we bear must begin with us displaying Christ-like, sacrificial, and radical love (vs. 17).
- We can bear a lot of spiritual sounding and impressive fruit (tongues, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, generosity, piety), but if we don't have Christ-like love for other people it counts for absolutely nothing (1 Cor. 13:1–3).

HATRED FROM THE WORLD (JOHN 15:18-27)

The disciples of Jesus would face tremendous opposition and persecution because of their faith.

- In fact (except for John), every one of them would eventually be martyred for their testimony in Christ—some would be crucified, impaled, hanged, beheaded, skinned alive, and even sawn in half.
 - Persecution of Christians hasn't ever gone away.
- Right now, in our world, one out of every seven Christians live under high levels of persecution or discrimination for their faith.
- In 2022, 5,898 Christians were murdered for their faith, there were 5,110 attacks on local churches, 3,829 abductions, and there were 24,678 beatings, death threats, and other abuses.
 - There is an irrational hatred for Christians from militant Islam, atheistic/communist governments, and other groups in 124 nations.

IN OUR CULTURE...

- Christianity is seen by many as backwards, antiquated, hateful, bigoted, and idiotic.
 - Christians are frequently blacklisted from the halls of academia, scorned/mockered by entertainment/media, and labeled as extremists by policymakers in many places.
 - New laws are being written to restrict Christians' ability to speak the truth of Scripture.
- There is an irrational hatred in our world for Christians—but it's not because of us; it's because of Jesus in us (vs. 18).

- The world would love us if we would just be like them and embrace their values of sin, sensuality, and moral anarchy (vs. 19).
- But we're not of the world; we belong to Jesus, we're under His authority (not our own), and our presence brings conviction.

This is why Jesus was murdered: He spoke the truth about sin that the world hated (vs. 21–22).

- They persecuted Him, and so they will persecute us because a servant isn't greater than his master (vs. 20).
- The one who hates Christians hates Jesus, and the one who hates Jesus hates God (vs. 23).
- Even though Jesus performed many signs and wonders, He still was rejected.

The unbelieving world didn't reject Jesus because they didn't have enough proof that He was God or witness His wonderful works; it's because He exposed their sin (vs. 24).

- This is a fulfillment of Psalm 69:4—"...they hated me for no reason."
- Most people don't reject Jesus because His claims are unreasonable/illogical: it's because they don't want to give up their sin.

There was only one way these disciples could face the opposition that was coming their way—through the help of the Counselor (the Holy Spirit).

- The Holy Spirit will testify about Jesus: He will make the words and ministry of Jesus real in our lives.
- The Holy Spirit will empower us to testify about Jesus to the unbelieving world even as they oppose our message (vs. 27).

ABIDE IN ME AND BEAR MUCH FRUIT (VS. 1-8).

- If you have saving faith, Christ's life flows through you, and that should be evidenced by the fruit of a changed, obedient life.
- Fruitlessness exposes frauds: a fruitless disciple of Jesus is no disciple at all.
- "Have you truly surrendered your heart and life to Christ? Are you abiding in Him and obeying His commands? Are you surrendered to His pruning?"

LOVE OTHERS LIKE I HAVE LOVED YOU (VS. 9-17).

- We're to receive Christ's love for us, and in that love is the act of gladly and joyfully obeying Jesus because we trust that He loves us and that His commands are for our good.
- We love sacrificially even as Jesus has loved us.
- "Am I willing to lay down my comfort and go without so that others can be loved, blessed, and cared for? If that isn't in my heart at all, why is that?"

THE WORLD WILL HATE YOU BECAUSE OF ME (VS. 18-25).

- There is an irrational hatred in our world for Christians, but it's not because of us; it's because of Jesus in us.
- The temptation is to become like the world so that they'll love us: but we can't do that because we're not of the world.
- "Are you okay with the world hating you if that means that God accepts you?"

APART FROM ME, YOU CAN DO NOTHING (VS. 5).

- The message of the Christian gospel is not "try harder," it's "draw closer."
- To truly change, become a better person, and receive salvation, we must first recognize our inability to change anything about ourselves.
- Instead of trying harder, we draw closer to our only source of life—Jesus Christ.
- "Have you given up doing it your way yet?"