

Jesus is ... – The Vine

Jan. 29, 2017- Pastor Randy

John 15:1-8

*"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. **Remain in me**, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you **remain in me**.*

*"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who **remain in me**, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone **who does not remain in me** is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you **remain in me** and **my words remain in you**, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.*

You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name."

In Chapters 14- 16 Jesus instruction and encouragement to His disciples right before his arrest and subsequent crucifixion. These words were preparing the disciples for the new creation that was going to come via Jesus death, resurrection, ascension and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus spoke these words he was using a metaphor that was very familiar to Jews like His disciples. The vine was a very common OT metaphor for Israel; the people of God. In Psalm 80 Israel is referred to as a "vine" that God uprooted from Egypt and planted in the promised land. Isaiah prophesied that was like a vine that was expected to produce good grapes but ended up producing wild grapes. God spoke through Jeremiah saying, "I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?" (2:21).

When Jesus declared that He was the true vine He was declaring that He had come to fulfill the mission that Israel had failed to fulfill. He had come to be the light of the world that Israel was supposed to be. Jesus also used this image to communicate that God's people would no longer be identified by national heritage but by their

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relationship with Jesus. He was saying that if you want to be part of the vine – the people of God – you need to be connected to me!

The first key phrase in this passage is: “Remain in me”. This is what our 21 Days of Devotion has been intended to do. To get us into Jesus and to get Jesus into us!

As you study the Gospel of John you discover this theme repeated over over again: Jesus calls people to believe in him. Faith is the requirement that qualifies us to:

1. Be saved from sin and judgment. (John 3:16,17; John 8:24)
2. Become one of God’s children or “sheep” (John 1:12; 10:25,26)
3. Receive eternal life (John 3:16; John 6:40; John 11:25,26)

We have also seen that the nature of faith is that it follows. Believing in Jesus results in attaching yourself to Jesus just like the branch is attached to the vine. Jesus repeatedly used the phrases “come to me” and “believe in me” as synonymous terms. To believe in Him IS to come to him (5:38-41; 6:35; 7:37,38). Belief in Jesus draws us to him to remain with Him!

Notice the change in Jesus language in verse 7. He begins to explain what remaining in Him looks like. He says, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you...” To have Jesus words in you means that you are listening to and following His teaching.

What should we expect to happen when we remain in Christ? The second key phrase in this passage is, “produce fruit”

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God has called you:

1. To produce "fruit"
2. Fruit that remains

Since these words are obviously figurative, we need to reflect on what it means for us to produce "fruit. The word "fruit" is applied in the following three ways:

1. Fruit of the Spirit/ Fruit of Righteousness

*Philippians 1:11 reads, "May you always be filled with **the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character** produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God."*

In Paul's letter to the Galatians he wrote that the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The first thing we can expect to see happen in our lives as we stay connected to Jesus is a change in our character. A couple of weeks ago I told you the story of Lee Strobel's conversion to Christ. An atheist who thought he would prove Jesus wasn't who the Bible says he is and didn't do what the bible says he did. His conversion to Christ didn't just result in a change in thinking. His conversion was not merely academic, it converted his character to the point that his own 5-year old daughter said, "I want God to do for me what he did for daddy." Charles Colson was Special Counsel to President Nixon. He was proud and ruthless, earning himself the nickname, Nixon's "hatchet man". After Chuck Colson's conversion to Christ he was humbled and turned into a man of compassion. He teamed up with a political foe that he formerly hated, Senator Harold Hughes. Putting political differences aside, together they founded Prison Fellowship. Today Prison Fellowship is an international organization where 1,000 full-time staff and board members, train, equip, and mobilize 45,000 volunteers in 120 countries and territories. In the US

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Prison Fellowship has a presence in approx. 1400 prisons serving 200,000 prisoners. They share the gospel and disciple men in prison, they provide assistance to families of those who are incarcerated and help ex-prisoners transition back into society. Prison Fellowship has been a leading voice for criminal justice reform.

2. Fruit of disciple-making. If you were to ask me, "What is the fundamental mission of the church?", my answer would be, "to make disciples". God has chosen to do the work of saving people through his saved people. He has chosen to do the work of transforming people so that their lives begin to produce righteous character through us. Our lives are producing good fruit when we discover other people are following Christ due to our influence, encouragement and example.

On day 4 of our 21-day journey through John's Gospel we read about Jesus outreach to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. She was a woman who was stigmatized and marginalized. That was due in part because of her sin, but also as a result of the sin of those who wrote her off because of her sin. People had labeled her. That's what people do. What I love about Jesus is that he specializes in removing labels! He didn't ignore her sin. He confronted it, but he didn't treat her as if her past and present condition meant she was hopeless. He offered her the hope of life. Jesus likened his outreach to this woman to a farmer gathering a harvest. He said, "*The harvesters are paid good wages, and **the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life.***"

3. Fruit of your work/labor.

In Psalm 128 the Psalmist encourages his readers by assuring them that if they follow the Lord they will enjoy the fruit of their labor. I have said this before, Work is a four-letter word but it is not a curse word. Work is good for us. Some Christians mistakenly think that work is a consequence of the fall, but that is incorrect. Work is a pre-fall structure. In Genesis, God's creative acts are described as God's work. Then we read that this God, who is a worker, created us in His image. Therefore, it should not surprise us that God put Adam and Eve in the garden to "work it and to keep it." God wants you to hear this: He is the Creator of the universe. He created you in His image; in His likeness. That doesn't mean you are going to create your own universe. It does mean He has given you creative,

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productive abilities that need to be put to work for the good of others and the glory of God. We know it is unhealthy for our bodies or minds to be idle. A couple of weeks ago I took a few guys from the Phila. Adult & Teen Challenge with me along another man from our church to help a couple of ladies move. When we were done I was thanking the men for their help and one of them responded by saying how good he always felt when he worked to help someone else.

You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works!

This fruit on the end of the branch is ultimately the product of the vine. If you have a branch of a grapevine, grapes show up at the end of the branches. If you are a branch of the God-vine, then God should be showing up out of the branches of your life! When we remain attached to Jesus we can expect our lives to produce godly character, godly people, and God-glorifying work.

One of the most important lessons we all need to learn in life is to know who you are. Knowing who you are also involves knowing who you are not. As a kid there were a number of other of people that I wanted to become. Evil Knievel. Part of being a kid is trying to figure out “who you are”. A sign of maturity is coming to know and accept who you are. It also means knowing who you are not!

I am not the vine. I am a branch.

Since I am not the vine, I am not self-sufficient.

Since I am not the vine, I am not self-righteous.

Since I am not the vine, I am not my own savior.

Since I am not the vine, I am not everybody else's Savior.

I am not the vine, BUT I am a branch.

As a branch my identity is tied to the Vine.

As a branch, I get to be connected to the Vine.

As a branch, I enjoy life from the Vine.

As a branch I have been appointed to produce GOOD fruit.

As a branch I have been appointed to produce MUCH fruit.

As a branch I have been appointed to produce LASTING fruit.

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