

Text: John 15:1-16

Title: "Believe because He is the true vine"

Time: 11/30/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The last verse of the previous chapter (14:31) tells us that Jesus and the eleven remaining disciples arose from their Passover mealtime and left the upper room. They were headed for the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives on the west side of Jerusalem, just beyond the temple complex. In the first verse of chapter 18, they will cross the Kidron River that runs through the Kidron valley and arrive at their destination.

This means, of course, that the teaching and praying of John 15-17 happened at some point on their brief trip from the upper room to the Garden. The reference to a vine in the first verse of our chapter is our best indication of where Jesus stopped to further instruct His disciples and to let them hear His High Priestly prayer for them. The golden east gate of Herod's temple was adorned with a golden vine that symbolized the nation of Israel as the chosen people of God, a truth in passages like Psalm 80:8-19.

That Psalm uses the metaphor of a flock on the one hand (v. 1), and of a vine planted by the Lord on the other (vv. 8-9), to symbolize the chosen nation of Israel. In spite of the Lord's blessing on this vine, it is ultimately destroyed (v. 16). And yet, this blessing of Israel persists after destruction with its call for the Lord's "man of [His] right hand, whom [He] made strong for Himself" (vv. 17-19).

On the stairs leading up to the east door of the temple, Jewish priests would daily gather to recite the priestly benediction on the people (Num. 6:23-27). It seems likely that it was from those stairs that Jesus told His disciples, "I am the true vine" and later prayed His High Priestly prayer for

them. This is the last of the great *I am* pronouncements of Christ in John's Gospel, which echo the self-identification of the God of Israel, who brought them out of the bondage of Egypt (*ego eimi*; cp. Exod. 3:14, Jesus: "I am the true vine").

This is not to say that the many OT passages like Psalm 80 describe Israel as a false vine. They do not. Jesus is the true vine, but that does not make Israel a false one. In John 6:32, Jesus tells us that He is the true bread from heaven in contrast to the mana that fell in the days of Moses. He did not mean that mana was false bread, nor does He mean here that Israel was a false chosen nation.

Instead, He means that, like mana, the vine Israel was a symbol and that He is the truth that manna and Israel symbolized. He means that they were shadows, and He is the substance that cast the shadow. In this sense, Jesus has always been the true vine, even in the days of the nation of Israel, just like He is the true body, which is the church, in our day of many local churches. John wants us to believe on Christ because He is this true vine, and I want us to see three things Jesus claims about Himself as the true vine.

I. The true vine is the plant of the farmer (v. 1).

Illustration: Brooks College at Baylor University has a vine on their College Crest or Coat of Arms. They explain that the vine symbolizes the growth that their students experience while at Baylor.

Application: In our Old Testaments, the vine always symbolizes some blessing from God in much the same way. Along with the fig tree, the vine is always a symbol of blessing, provision, and prosperity (cp. the reign of Solomon - 1 Kings 4:25, "And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon").

And wherever we see a vine of blessing, we see that it is the

Lord who plants and tends it. Jesus tells us that He is the true vine and that His Father is the true husbandman or farmer. The Greek word for *husbandman* comes from two words, one meaning *earth* and the other meaning *to work*. So as we read about God the Father as the farmer of the true vine, we must credit Him not only with tending the plant, but also with planting it in the earth in the first place.

The provision of Jesus the true vine was the plan of God the Father. James reminds us: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (Jam. 1:17-18). Jesus is the best such gift. Psalm 80 tells us that He also planted Israel (v. 8), and Acts 9:31 tells us that He plants local churches today: "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

The Planter of Israel yesterday and local churches today planted the true vine, Jesus Christ, to make these others plantings possible: "But God commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). This is the Father's love for sinners like us.

II. The true vine is the plant of the true branches (vv. 2-8).

Illustration: Many plants have two kinds of branches, fruit-bearing branches and the fruitless ones.

Application: This is the case with Jesus the true vine. He tells us that He has in Him some branches that are fruitful, but then also others that are unfruitful and must be removed by the Father (v. 2). We learn also that these unfruitful branches do not abide in the vine as the Lord commands, and this explains their unfruitfulness (v. 5). After

the Father removes these branches, they dry up, and others gather them together and throw them into the fire (v. 6).

As Bible readers it is easy to understand that fruitful branches are in Christ, but less easy to understand in what sense unfruitful branches are also in the vine according to verse 2 and the basic assumptions of this metaphor. This is hard because it is clear that some connected to the vine can lose that connection and perish after all. That teaching is hard to reconcile with Jesus's other promises about the believer's eternal security, like John 10:28-29, "And I give unto them [His sheep] eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Some commentators caution against pressing the vine metaphor too far, explaining that this original connection of the unfruitful branch to Christ the vine is not a true connection – that it is a false profession of faith but not true saving faith that has received the miracle of salvation. False faith that fails to save is certainly a theme in the Gospel of John, but in this passage both kinds of branches seem originally connected to the vine in the same true sense. We do not read that the unfruitful branches were never really connected, but that the Father removed their connection from the vine.

For this reason, I believe this passage reflects the doctrine we find elsewhere about both the universality of the atoning work of Christ on the cross and the exclusivity of salvation for only those who truly believe. For example, Paul wrote in 1 Tim. 4:10 that Jesus is "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." And John, our Gospel's author, taught in 1 John 2:2 that Jesus is "the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Similarly, I believe our passage is teaching that Jesus died

for all men and the whole world, and so in that sense they are branches in Him, but also that only the fruitful branches, those who truly trust Jesus as Savior once they come to the age of accountability, are allowed to remain connected to the vine by the Father. Those who reject what the Savior has done for them in final unbelief are removed from this blessing of atonement and cast into the fire in the end.

The true vine is the plant of the true branches, those who truly believe. These branches the Father never removes, but He does purge them (v. 2). That word *purge* simply means *to cleanse*. Jesus tells His disciples that the Father has already done this for them, and He tells them how (v. 3). They had become clean through Jesus's word.

Interestingly, Lev. 19:23 contained an agricultural instruction for the children of Israel that said that the fruit from any newly planted plant was to be considered unclean and not eaten for the first three years of its produce. It became clean in year four. Jesus had been teaching His disciples for three years, and he tells them on the completion of those three years that they are now clean because of His word.

So in order for you and I to be a fruitful branch, we must first be cleansed by God's word. Many verses of Scripture teach us about its power to do this for us: Jam. 1:18, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures"; Eph. 5:25-27, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

Having been cleansed this way as true branches of the true vine, the disciples now have an important responsibility when it comes to achieving greater fruitfulness (vv. 4-8).

The more fruit, the more God is glorified (v. 8). Fruitfulness is the goal of every farmer, God the Father included, and it must be our goal as well. How do we accomplish this? We obey a simple command. It is not the command “bear fruit,” because we have no ability to do that (v. 15b, “without me you can do nothing”). Rather, it is the twofold command, “abide in Me and let me abide in you” (v. 4). That is a hard command to understand until we see what results from our obedience to this command – Jesus explains, “My words abide in you” (v. 7).

So, if we have let Christ abide in us, it means that we have let His words abide in us. And the way we let His words abide in us is that we abide in His words – we meditate on God’s Word. To abide in Him is to meditate on His words. It is only God’s Word that can make a branch clean, and it is only God’s Word that can make clean branches bear much fruit for the glory of the Father. How important is God’s Word to us? Our honest answer to that question will measure our potential for fruitfulness for His glory.

III. The true vine is the plant of Christlike love (vv. 9-16).

Illustration: Grape vines produce a certain kind of fruit – grapes. Other vines produce pumpkins or squash. Pear trees produce pears, and apple trees produce apples.

Application: What kind of fruit do true branches of the true vine produce? Jesus is very clear that this vine is not a grape-vine, but a love-vine (v. 9). Jesus’s words or commandments are again the key to abiding in this love (v. 10). These commandments must not merely be read, but also kept. This love is not the love of word only, but the love of deed. Jesus’s purpose in empowering His people to this kind of love is so that they might experience complete joy (v. 11). Loving others can seem burdensome to us, but Jesus assures us that it brought Him great joy, and that if we trust Him in simple faithful obedience, it will do the same for us.

The true vine set the example of this love that He expects from His true branches (v. 12). He commends setting your life aside for one another as He did for us as the greatest kind of fruit we can bear (v. 13). Then He tells us that to live like this and for this reason is to be His friend (vv. 14-15; just like Abraham was called the friend of God — Jam. 2:23). Faithful, fruitful, loving branches are not only Jesus's servants, but also His friends. They were chosen by Him to abide in Him and to bear fruit that abides forever (v. 16).

Conclusion: Are we cleansed and fruitful branches? After their arrival at Gethsemane, the disciples fail to abide in Christ and His words. They had heard a lot of Jesus's words and were ready for a break. Jesus tells them to pray, given the promises about prayer in our passage (vv. 7, 16), but they could only fall asleep.

When the crisis of Jesus's betrayal and arrest came, the response of sleeping disciples was first to strike with carnal force, then to run with carnal fear, then to deny with carnal betrayal, and finally to go fishing with carnal apathy. This fruit did not glorify the Father. Jesus's command was "love one another," but that night it became "every man for himself." For a few very miserable days, these disciples were still cleansed, but not nourished and fruitful branches. They did not abide in the true vine and His words.

But today we look back on these eleven lives, and we find that they truly glorified the Father. They changed the world with their fruitful love. Jesus's words greatly abode in them, and they ultimately gave us the New Testament.

Awakened to this higher cause, and prepared by the words of their risen Savior (Acts 1:3), their prayers were powerfully answered, word-filled prayers like that of Peter in Acts 4: "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, 'Why did the heathen rage,

and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.’ For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.”

Abiding in the words of the true vine, their watchwords became “I am abiding in Christ” and “Christ is abiding in me.” Convinced of this blessing, eleven fallible men changed their world. Let’s abide in Christ and His Word daily, truly love one another as we should, and see together what He shall do by us for our world today.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*