

I am the True Vine, John 15:1-11

As you get older, or especially as you have children, you start to get this new set of pleasure. Like, when your idea of a great evening is doing absolutely nothing, you know you are getting older. When you look forward to bedtime you know you are getting older.

Well one pleasure that has snuck up on me the last few years is the pleasure of gardening. There's incredible joy in the process of preparing the soil, planting seeds, or dropping in ready made sprouts, cultivating, and pruning, watering, and finally, harvesting and eating. My wife will attest, I can be out there in the garden and completely lose track of time.

We've been growing tomatoes this summer, it's been awesome, our kids have loved it. Hattie actually now knows the difference between a store bought tomato and one from the garden. She refused to eat store bought the other day. But she'll go out there and just grab em and munch on em like candy.

There's something very pleasant and rewarding from gardening, especially when you are able to enjoy the fruit of your labor.

What's interesting, is the Bible compares God to a master gardener, whose not dealing with physical plants, but whose dealing with people. This morning, we are going to explore what it means for God to be the sovereign gardener, and how we can bear fruit for His glory.

The Need for Fruit (v.1-2, 6)

15:1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 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. . . 6 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.

Here we have once more some hard teachings of Jesus. He's laying out a scene here, where He, the Son, is a vine, and the Father, is the vinedresser. It's interesting here this is the only of the I AM statements that have an additional mention of the Father. He's using vine language, an illustration, which was familiar to the disciples, to relay the Truth about Himself and truth about reality. I love how Jesus is always using illustrations to help us understand the truth.

And the focus of this passage is landing on bearing fruit.

Let's first ask, what is fruit? What is Jesus talking about here? The fruit of the spirit is a great place to start, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Fruit is the byproduct that naturally arises from faith in Jesus. Fruit displays itself in the obedience to Jesus, in personal holiness, in love for the church, and in witnessing to the world. Fruit is, like we talked about last week, doing the works of Jesus.

He says if you are not bearing this fruit, you are taken away.

Now, interestingly, As I have been reading some bible scholars on this passage, they seem to believe that Jesus here is doing something unique. You might read this and think that the branches that don't bear fruit are the wicked, that don't have anything to do with Jesus, and don't want to have anything to do with Jesus. And while that is true, they certainly are not bearing fruit in Jesus, it seems in this passage, Jesus may be bringing closer in, within the religious community.

In other words, when He says, every branch in me, He may be talking about a superficial connection. That is, there is a nearness to Jesus, but there is not a knowing Jesus. You may be in church your whole life, and not know Him, not be bearing fruit in His name.

This is like the terrifying passage, **Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’**

There's potential for deception here. We've got to be careful. We have to do the hard work of self-examination to see if we are in the faith, if we are indeed trusting in Christ. I mean these guys were in ministry. Did we not prophesy in your name. Not the words you want to hear.

That's a branch that does not bear fruit. Our current text says, you are taken away. What does this mean? Look down at v. 6, **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.**

The same argument here is being made about bearing fruit, except the language of abide is used, which as we will see the two are inseparable. If you abide, you bear fruit. If you don't abide you don't bear fruit. And the inescapable reality here that Jesus points to is eternal separation from God. It's the awful reality of the place of judgement. The branches are thrown away and wither, they are gathered, thrown into a fire, and burned. That's an unthinkable reality, but it is reality. It's the most horrible of all realities, the worst possible existence. Fire, burning, forever. Suffering, forever.

Maybe that sounds harsh to you. It's definitely not an easy one to swallow. But we have to remember that we are just humans, and in sinning we commit cosmic treason against an infinitely holy God. The only thing He owes us is judgement.

Here we have, once more, the inescapable reality of our judgement. It's appointed that all men should die and all men should then be judged. We will be judged according to this measure, is there fruit in our life?

You can't be indifferent to your life after you have come to Christ. There must be fruit. Has there been transformation in your heart? Do you have new desire? Do you love Jesus and love His people, love the lost? Care about spreading His glory.

This is grace for us. As we saw when we went through 1 John, He's wanting to assure our hearts.

As we may be tempted to despair here, and same with the disciples, Jesus gives a comforting word as He points to the source of fruit.

The Source of Fruit (v.1)

15:1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 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. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 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. 5 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. 6 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. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

We can't miss the main point of this text, Jesus is the source of all fruit. We are not. We in ourselves, cannot produce anything of value to God. He's stripping us of pride here. He's causing us to have one focal point, Jesus.

John has been huge in His gospel about Jesus being this replacement to everything in the OT. The manna from heaven, I'm it. The light of the world, I'm it. The temple, I'm it. All the ceremonies and sacrificing, I'm it. The good shepherd, I'm Him.

We also see this vine language throughout the OT as well, and the vine it refers to the people of God.

Psalm 80:8-11

You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.

But the interesting thing about how this vine language is used to refer to the OT people of God, is that every time it is brought up there is with it the threat of judgement, on their failure to produce fruit.

God had done so much for the people, and their stubborn, wicked hearts, caused them to never be the fruit producing vine that God called them to be.

We are also incapable of producing fruit.

Now, Jesus words stand in direct contrast to that. He's already replaced everything the people did, now He's replacing the people of God. He's saying, in saying I am the true vine, He's saying, I am true Israel.

He's the vine that has fruit bearing sap running all through it. Our job is to connect ourselves to Him. **3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 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. 5 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.**

Now we make real sure where we are laying the emphasis here. What we are not advocating is a salvation by works. It can be very easy to misread these types of texts and get filled with guilt, endless introspection and condemnation. That is absolutely not what Jesus is trying to say.

It's faith in Jesus that produces fruit. Fruit is not doing "good deeds" minus faith. Loving others minus Jesus, minus faith, is not the fruit that God is after. Without faith it is impossible to please God. So faith must be driving this fruit. Good deeds, as good as they may be, without faith they are done with the wrong heart, to the wrong end, for the glory of self, not the glory of God.

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 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.

He's pointing to the cross here when talking about His love for us. Here's what is really cool. The Israelites could not bear fruit on their own, neither can we, and therefore were deserving of Judgment.

He's both the judgement for the fruitless and the fruitbearing life for the fruitless. He takes our sin and He gives us His righteousness.

As we believe in Jesus, that's how we abide in Jesus. Belief in Jesus that gives rise to obedience. We can't be indifferent to obedience. It's the grace of God that trains us to renounce wickedness. We aren't talking about perfection, but we are talking about following Jesus. 1 John will explore that.

You've got to get His life, His sap flowing in you.

Romans 7:4

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh i live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Have you given up on your ability to bear fruit for God? To do good? You have to get to that spot, where you believe everything you do is tainted by your wicked heart. You don't need to change your behavior, you need a new heart.

do you desire to bear fruit? That's what I want to ask. Do you desire to bear fruit to the glory of God? That's what happens when we die to ourselves and the Spirit of God fills us. The new life desires to bear fruit to God. That's what the life-giving power of the vine does in the branch.

Pruning for Fruit (v.2-3)

2 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.

What this is saying is that every christian undergoes pruning for the sake of producing fruit. This is the long road of sanctification, which means us becoming like Christ. When we are justified by His blood, we are forgiven and covered in His righteousness, but we are not yet manifesting that reality, it's a process as we walk to full glory. And that process requires difficulty, discipline, or pruning.

This passage is very personal to me. I was saved in middle school, and the Lord was moving in my life in powerful ways through high school. But by the time I got to my freshman year at UNC, I had done my fare share of walking in the world. Well one night, I'll never forget it, in my dorm room of Franklin Towers, I was lying on my bed and reading a book called the "secrets of the vine" which was basically walking through this text, and there was an application question, are there any branches in your life that aren't bearing fruit, that you need to repent of, allow the Lord to cut off, so that you may bear more fruit? Well I knew it clear as day, I was addicted to psychedelic drugs, and the Holy Spirit was asking me to repent. Being stubborn and sinful, I gave God the heisman stiff arm that night.

It was like God was saying, we can do this the easy way through repentance, or we do this the hard way through pruning. And I chose the hard way. He basically turned me over to my desires and entered into greater levels of addiction and greater darkness of depression. It would be two years until God would graciously pull me back out. Two years to prune me.

But on the backside, I have no regrets, because God uses all things for His glory and for my good. I am so thankful for that time where God was stripping me of dependance upon myself, weaning me from this world, and working to give me a glimpse of the glory of His grace. It was coming out of that that set the trajectory of my life. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

My story is not unique, you may not have had the same struggles I did, but if you have been walking with the Lord for any amount of time, you know its the difficult seasons of life that you look back on in wonder and amazement, at what God was doing.

Corrie Ten Boom (a christian, who in Nazi Germany WWII, was arrested for smuggling Jews to freedom, suffered terribly, but with great faith) hear her song as she reflects on her journey...

I asked the Lord, that I might grow
 In faith, and love, and every grace;
 Might more of his salvation know,
 And seek more earnestly his face.
 I hoped that in some favoured hour
 At once He'd answer my request,
 And by his love's constraining power
 Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
 The hidden evils of my heart;
 And let the angry powers of hell
 Assault my soul in every part.
 Yea more, with his own hand he seemed
 Intent to aggravate my woe;
 Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
 Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

"Lord, why is this?" I trembling cried,
 "Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?"
 "Tis in this way," the Lord replied,
 "I answer prayer for grace and faith.
 These inward trials I employ
 From self and pride to set thee free;
 And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
 That thou may'st seek thy all in me."

It doesn't have to be willful sin that leads us into pruning. It can happen just because we need to grow. Hebrews 12 says that we must endure discipline, and we should rejoice in it, because God is treating us like sons, like His children. There may be absolutely nothing you have done that causes you to go through a difficult season. Instead, it's to be seen as favor and grace upon your life, that God is disciplining you.

That's one of the main problems with the health, wealth, prosperity gospel. Your faith does not equal a life of comfort. True faith gives birth to trial.

Maybe you are going through something difficult this morning.

Take comfort knowing that trial came through the sovereign Hand of a loving Vinedresser, who is passionate and all wise to make you bear more fruit. He is up to something in that sadness, difficulty, and darkness. He was cultivating fruit from your life. Though you don't see it now, you will. Hold on. Press on. He will create in you Christlikeness and He knows exactly what it will take.

Phil 1:6, And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you, will bring it to completion at the day of Christ.

Finally, let's turn to the

Motivation for Fruit

7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 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. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

The two supreme motivations of every soul should be the glory of God and personal joy. The beautiful thing here is that God has so designed this world and designed us that when we are bearing fruit for the glory of God we are also maximizing our joy.

The wellspring of joy is not found anywhere else. It's found in giving glory to God. Now, how can you seek the glory of God and your personal joy at the same time. Isn't one desire unselfish and the other selfish. How can I be about God's glory and my joy at the same time?

The answer to that is pursuing your joy is not ultimately selfish. The pursuit of joy is not a wicked desire, as if seeking pleasure wicked. No, pursuing joy in wicked things is wicked. Pursuing joy in righteous things, is righteous.

And what Jesus tells us here is that fullness of joy is found in God.

The human makeup is a joy seeking machine, it can't NOT pursue joy. Everything we do is laced with this inner desire for joy, or call it happiness, pleasure, or satisfaction, even worship. That will change how you think about joy... what you find joy in, that's what you are really worshiping.

Jesus did not come to kill the party, He came to bring the party, He's not a joy-killer He's a joy giver.

If we are satisfied with life without Jesus, we are fooled, we are believing a lie. There is no ultimate joy outside of Jesus. That's what this closing line is trying to teach us. This world offers one type of joy, the next world offers another. Just like when Hattie tasted the true fruit from the garden, and realized it so far surpassed store bought. Up till that time, she didn't know any better, she actually liked store bought.

There's also an obedience piece here that we can't miss. Joy is tied to our obedience, or to our fruit bearing. Does joy break into sinner's heart when they come to know Jesus? You bet, it can explode that heart with joy. But for that new believer to remain in that joy and to experience more of it, he has to walk in faith in obedience. So, obedience without faith, which is cold religion, and leads to self-righteousness. There's no joy in self-righteousness. But in the same way there's no joy in living in sin. You've been born again. The Spirit of God in you is at war with the passions of your flesh. You can no longer find joy in sin, you can only find it in God and walking in His ways.

This is the fruit that Jesus says, glorifies the Father. Now here is the really cool thing I want to point out. Jesus is all about the Father's glory. And it's fruit that gives glory to God. But Jesus has done something so amazing. He has chosen His primary and sole means of bearing fruit to the Father to be through His people.

The Church is plan A for bearing fruit and there is no other plan. Jesus has so united Himself with His people. Without trying to press this analogy too hard, the vine does not bear fruit on its own, He needs branches. Those branches are His people.

This should cause us to have great confidence and anticipation that we can bear fruit. The point of this is not to frustrate us or cause us to despair of fruit. It's to encourage us. God is bearing this fruit through us, through Jesus, to maximize our joy and His own glory.

As if to clear up any remaining anxiety on part of the disciples or any pride and looking to self for fruit, listen to what He says in **John 15:16, You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.**

We have a great God who is determined to bear fruit through us, let us respond in worship and fruitful works of righteousness that glorify His name.