

WHO IS JESUS?

THE TRUE VINE

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman...I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

John 15: 1, 5

Home missionary, Pastor Audred Spruiensma

WHO IS JESUS? HIS CONNECTION WITH US

It is delightful during the summer or fall to walk through a vineyard. The leaves are green, and huge clusters of grapes are hanging on the branches. Can you visualize this figure? And of course, afterwards you get to taste the good wine that is produced by these vines.

This figure was a common one to see in the land of Israel. And in Scripture, Israel as a nation is referred to as a vine planted by God (Psalm 80:8-11). When Jesus calls himself the vine, he is drawing a beautiful picture of himself with his church. Jesus is one plant with his people. Jesus is the vine, and his people are the branches. There is an intimate connection. We are united to Jesus by faith.

Jesus could make this comparison because God created the world in such a way that it could point to spiritual truths. So the physical vine is a picture of Jesus and his church. Israel in the Old Testament was a picture (type) of Christ. Jesus now says, “I am the true vine.” The other vines were symbols, but Christ is the perfect fulfilment. Israel as a nation failed to produce good fruit. Jesus came to be the perfect, essential, enduring vine of which the others were only a faint reflection.

JESUS IS THE TRUE VINE

The vine with its roots planted in the soil is the source of life for the branches and the fruit that is produced. Jesus is the source of all life for his church. He gives strength to the church and causes her to be productive to his glory. Jesus grants to his church all the blessings of salvation.

As with the physical vine, the branches have nothing if they are cut off from the vine. They have to be connected. How are they connected? There is a farmer, a vine-dresser. John 15:1 refers to the husbandman. It is he that plants the vine. It is he who cares for the vine. He prunes the vine branches, and grafts other branches into the vine. The branches draw their life from the vine.

Jesus' Father in heaven gave Jesus to be the life for his people. We depend upon Jesus for our spiritual life, vitality, nutrition and salvation. We depend upon Jesus, just as the branch depends upon the vine for everything. Without Jesus Christ, we are nothing. In Christ we receive grace, forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life.

How is Jesus this life providing vine? The answer is first found in the “I am” statement. Jesus is the true vine, the source of life, strength, and salvation to his church because he is God. God is the source of all that we need.

Secondly, Jesus is this vine because God planted his son, Jesus, here in our world. He came in the likeness of men, our sinful flesh as a lowly vine. He bore our sin and guilt and death. But by his resurrection, he gives life to us, making us living branches.

Thirdly, there is, in the figure of the vine, wonderful fruit. Jesus stresses this in our passage. Jesus is the One who causes the branches to bear fruit. How disappointing it would be if we walked through a vineyard and there was absolutely no fruit, or only sickly fruit. Six times Jesus mentions bearing fruit or not bearing fruit. Everything depends upon the branches being connected to the vine. Everything depends upon our being connected to Jesus. Jesus is the only power that enables his people to produce fruit. That was why Jesus said in verse 3: “now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” Jesus cleanses us and enables us to bring forth good fruit.

Of ourselves, all that we can produce is sin and evil. The only reason that you and I are able to bear any fruit that is pleasing to God is because we are connected to Jesus. He is the source, our strength, and our life. All our strength to do good is in Jesus.

THE FRUIT THAT IS PRODUCED

What is that fruit? Fruit-bearing is mentioned six times in John 11:1-8. It is very important! The fruit is

the fruit of faith. It is a live, active faith. It is not merely saying, "I am a Christian," or "I belong to a church." It is not just a matter of words. Oh, it is words. It is confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God publicly, boldly, without shame. But faith is also a life lived for Jesus. It is a life lived in obedience to his Word and commandments. It is a godly life of clean speech, pure action, and love for God and our neighbors.

Our life will stand out sharply over against the lives of other people in the world who live for themselves, for sin, and for the devil. We will imitate the life and person of Jesus. No fault could be found in him. His word was truth. Oh, the fruit Jesus produces in us is a holy life. It is daily sorrow for our sins and turning away from them. We call that "conversion". It is putting away anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth and not lying to one another (Col. 3:9, 10). Instead of these, we put on kindness, gentleness, humility, meekness, forgiving one another, and love (Col. 3:12-14).

How important is this fruit? What does God the vinedresser do? Jesus says that every branch that does not bear fruit, God takes away. These are hypocrites in the church who pretend to be Christians. They are branches in that they belong to the church. They might confess Jesus with their mouth, but produce no fruit. Because they bear no fruit, the Father cuts them off. They have no connection to Jesus. This was the case with one of Jesus' disciples. He was part of the group that followed Jesus. But he was a thief and betrayed Jesus. He was cast out!

But even true believers who are in Christ need the pruning of the Vinedresser. They are real Christians who love Jesus and live a holy life. But because we are still sinful, so weak, even our best works are tainted with sin. So the Father works on us and cuts out the actions that flow from our sinfulness. He purges our hearts and lives so that we will be more holy and obedient. God prunes us with his Word,

the preaching of the gospel. He prunes us sometimes with afflictions, trouble, pain, and sickness. This is not pleasant, but painful. It is as necessary as the surgeon's knife that cuts out a diseased part of the body. What an important work of God in our lives, making us more productive.

THE NECESSITY OF ABIDING IN JESUS

Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me (John 15:4)." Jesus is speaking here to his disciples, saved men. They were in Christ. Jesus is saying to them and to us, "Remain in me. Don't sever yourself from me. Look to me and depend upon me.

Why does Jesus say this? A true branch cannot be severed from Jesus the vine. If not, why is there this warning? The answer is that by our experience we cut ourselves off from Jesus. It is easy to think that once we are saved, we can make it on our own without Jesus. We think that we are strong and can be fruitful without staying in close fellowship with Christ. How do we do this? We stop praying and reading God's Word. We do not go to worship services to hear the preaching of the Word. We cannot produce good works without staying or abiding in Jesus. So Jesus calls us to abide in him.

What is involved in abiding in Jesus? Jesus makes a wonderful promise in vs. 5, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit..." Jesus abides always with us! But how do we abide in him? In vs. 7 Jesus says, "If ye abide in me, and *my words* abide in you..." It is by the power of his *Word* that we are saved and it is by the power of that *Word* that we abide in him and he is us. Do you keep up with your devotions and Bible study? Do you faithfully attend a good church where the preaching of the gospel is emphasized? Let Christ's *Word* abide in you that he may abide in you. Then we will be branches, not scrawny branches, but vibrant branches with much fruit!