

## INTRODUCTION:

As we begin our lesson this morning, I have asked a couple of young men to help distribute something, and as you can see, they are passing out grapes.

- I would like to encourage everyone to take one each and hold on to it for a minute, and we will come back to it in just a few minutes.
- At the same time, I would invite you to turn with me to **John 15**.
- In the book of **John** our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, made several **"I AM"** statements.

If you have not done so already, you might want to underline these, but they are found near the beginning to the middle of the book of **John**.

- The first is found in **John 6:35**, where Jesus said, ***"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty."***
- The second is found in **John 8:12**, where Jesus said, ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."***
- The third is found in **John 10:7,9-10**, where Jesus said, ***"I am the gate for the sheep...I am the gate. Whoever enters by Me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."***
- The fourth statement is found in **John 10:11,14**, where Jesus said, ***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."***
- The fifth **"I AM"** statement is found in **John 11:25**, where Jesus said, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die, will live."***
- The sixth statement is found in **John 14:6**, where Jesus said, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."***
- And for this morning's lesson, the final statement is found in **John 15:1**, where Jesus said, ***"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinegrower."***

With this in mind, and as we go back to the grapes that we have been given, let's consider several thought questions:

- First of all, where did these grapes come from? IGA is the short answer, but beyond that, where did they come from?
- Secondly, is the quality of this grape an accident, or was it tended? Do you think these were picked by the side of the road, or were they grown in a vineyard and specifically grown for a purpose?
- Another question: Would I rather eat this grape, or the branch that it came from?
- We could also ask: If the branch that grew this grape had not produced grapes, what good would it have done?
- And one final question: How do I know whether this is a good piece of fruit?

You can eat it now if you want to do so. Bob and RuthAnn are responsible for cleaning the building this week, so whatever you do, I would just ask that you not get me in trouble with Bob and RuthAnn 😊!

Before we look at **John 15:1-11**, I should point out something from the closing verse of the previous chapter.

- In that verse, as the disciples are wrapping up the Last Supper, Jesus says, ***"Rise, let us be on our way."***
- Apparently, then, the disciples had finished the dinner where the Lord's Supper was instituted, and they were leaving the upper room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Most scholars agree that as they left the gates of the city, they passed a vineyard.

- As Jesus sees the vines, and as the taste of fresh grape juice is still in their mouths from the memorial dinner, He starts in with **John 15:1-11**.

*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 bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.*

*3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*

*4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.*

*5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*

*6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.*

*7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

*8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*

*9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also 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 so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*

As we look back over these 11 verses, I would like for us to absorb what Jesus said by looking at several lessons.

- One of the most basic questions we could ask about any passage is, **“Why did the Holy Spirit include these words in the Bible?”**
- When we find the answer to that question, we have gone a long way in understanding any particular passage.
- And so it is with that question in mind that I would like for us to consider the opening words of **John 15**.

I. One of the first things we notice by looking at these verses and then stepping away to absorb the big picture, is that **WE ARE VERY CLEARLY INVITED INTO AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS AND OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.**

Right away, the various parts of this picture are fairly obvious and are defined in the text itself.

- Right in **verse 1**, our Father is described as the **“vinedresser.”**
- Other translations refer to our Father as the **“vinegrower”** or the **“gardener.”**
- The Greek word literally refers to someone who is an **“earth worker.”**
- By the way, it is the same word that is the basis for the proper name **“George.”**
- Our Father is the one who takes care of the vineyard and prepares the soil.

Also in **verse 1**, we see right away that Jesus describes Himself as the **“vine.”**

- As the vine, Jesus is the source of nutrients and energy.
- He is the stock who provides the genetics and the pattern for the entire plant.
- It is interesting that Jesus describes Himself very specifically as the **“true vine.”**
- By saying that, Jesus implies that there are other vines out there, but that He is the true one.

Further on, in **verse 5**, the disciples are specifically told that they (individually) are the branches—sprouting and growing off of the vine.

- Many in the denominational world have tried to twist this passage into justifying their existence by saying that various denominations are the branches.
- And so their idea is that it is okay to have denominations, because we all believe in Jesus, and Jesus is the vine, and we are all simply using different paths on our way to heaven.

- However, we should point out here at the beginning that individual disciples are identified as the branches.
- In other words, all of us as Christians are directly tied to the vine.
- All of us have a direct relationship with the Lord.
- All of us are directly dependent on the Lord.
- This passage is clearly speaking of individuals NOT divisions of the Lord's church.

In many ways, it is comforting to me that we are the branches.

- We are not the vine. We are servants, not the master. We are slaves, not the owners.
- We have willingly put ourselves in that position, because we want the strength and the blessings that come from being connected to the vine.
- I think all of us have seen branches that have been broken off during a storm.
- For the first day or so, it may be hard to tell that anything has changed—the leaves are still green.
- But after a few days, the leaves start to wither and die, and eventually they fall off.
- The branch gets brittle as it dries out, and eventually it rots away.
- The problem is that the branch is no longer connected to the source.

With that in mind, it is interesting to me that the word **“abide”** is used at least 7 times in this short passage.

- It is sometimes translated as **“dwell”** or **“remain,”** and it carries the idea of being continually connected.
- It refers to a deep (or very close) intimacy that lasts over time, as opposed to a casual acquaintance.
- It is an invitation to develop a commitment to stay with something over the long haul, to settle down, or keep on.

It is this term that describes our relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus invites us into an intimate fellowship.

- Unfortunately, like some human relationships, this is not always the case.
- The ideal does not always take place.
- We can look at the marriage relationship, and we understand that there are different types of union in marriage.
- Some people are married, and they have a marriage certificate as proof, but they are miserable, because there is no real intimate fellowship in the marriage.
- Marriage for them has become a casual relationship—basically the association of roommates who happen to live in the same house.
- Jesus is saying that the Christian faith can also deteriorate in the same way.
- Branches that were once fruitful and healthy can wither and die. Jesus is inviting us to keep that from happening.
- He is inviting us into a warm and close relationship.

I am reminded of the invitation in **Revelation 3:20**, where Jesus said, **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”**

- Jesus wants us to know Him in a very friendly and personal way.

Like you, I have known some people where the more I get to know them, the more I avoided them and couldn't stand to be around them.

- On the other hand, all of us have also known people where the more we get to know them, the more we want to be with them.
- Jesus is in this second category.
- No matter what we have done, Jesus is eagerly inviting us into a personal relationship.

On our end, this relationship is based on the decisions we make.

- We are invited to **“abide”** with the Lord, and we accept that invitation in a number of ways.

- In **verse 7**, Jesus refers to His words abiding in us.
- In other words, we look at God’s word on a regular basis.
- The Lord speaks to us in the Scriptures, and the Scriptures influence our decisions and everything we say and do.
- We are also invited to maintain an active prayer life.
- **Verse 7** mentions asking for what we wish.
- In **verse 9**, we read about abiding in the love of Christ.
- I should remind you that the greatest commandments (in terms of importance) are to love the Lord and love one another.
- **Verse 10** gives us another way to abide in the Lord—we are to keep the Lord’s commandments.
- Some people are amazed to find that our merciful Lord has given us commandments, but He has, and we show our love by keeping those commandments.

By doing these things and accepting the Lord’s offer of a close relationship, we are giving meaning to our lives.

- You might have noticed the statement in **verse 5**, where Jesus said, “*...for apart from Me you can do nothing.*”
- He does not mean that we will not be able to function, because we know that without a relationship with Christ, you can run a business.
- We know it is possible to raise a family without Christ.
- We can do a lot of things without the Lord, we can be active and busy, and yet without the Lord, we have truly achieved nothing.

First of all, then, we have been invited into an intimate relationship with the Lord.

## II. There is a second lesson from these verses, and that is, **WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO BEAR FRUIT.**

The purpose of a grape vine, obviously, is to bring forth grapes.

- Vineyards are not planted just to look nice—they are planted for the purpose of bearing fruit.
- All through the story, the Lord puts emphasis on the fruit.

There is an interesting section in the Old Testament book of **Isaiah** where the nation of Israel is compared to a grape vine.

- **Isaiah 5**—it is a rather disturbing passage, but it applies to this morning’s study. **Isaiah 5:1-7.**

- 1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved—A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.*
- 2 He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.*
- 3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard.*
- 4 “What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?”*
- 5 “So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.*
- 6 “I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.”*
- 7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.*

This picture very clearly continues over into the New Testament—we, as Christians, are also expected to bear fruit—otherwise, our branch will be removed.

- Any of us as gardeners expect to benefit from our labor; otherwise, our labor is vain.
- We expect to see a return on our investment.
- What is this benefit, or return, or fruit that we are talking about?
- According to **Isaiah**, God was looking for the fruit of “*justice*” and “*righteousness.*”
- In the New Testament, we have two verses in **Galatians 5** that tell us very specifically what God is looking for.
- In **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul said, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*”
- This is the fruit that God is looking for in all of us as individual Christians—otherwise, our branch will be removed.

Those of you who are familiar with grapes will understand that drastic pruning is necessary every year to encourage a grape vine to produce fruit, and not just leaves.

- It often takes a number of years to get that vine to produce fruit and there are some very specific pruning techniques that must be used.
- If this pruning is not done regularly, the branches will produce more leaves than grapes.

I find it interesting that while Jesus was here on earth, that (as far as I can tell) there was only one time when he cursed anything, and the curse was directed at a fig tree with no fruit.

- He did not do this because the tree had poisonous fruit, but because it had no fruit—nothing but leaves—like someone who is hired by a company to do a job, and then refuses to do the job—a useless situation.

The bottom line for us is that we are encouraged by Christ to bear fruit.

- The fruit of the Christian life is “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*”
- As the vine, this is the kind of life Jesus lived, and we (as the branches) are expected to produce fruit in the same way.

First of all, then, we are invited into an intimate relationship with the Lord, and secondly, we are encouraged to bear fruit in our Christian lives.

### III. There is a third lesson we can learn this morning, and that is, **WE ARE URGED IN THESE VERSES TO LIVE A LIFE THAT GLORIFIES GOD.**

As we think about this, we should remind ourselves of who the fruit is for.

- The branch does not benefit from the fruit, but the fruit exists for the benefit of the gardener.
- As Jesus says in **verse 8**, “*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*”
- The end product is a life that makes a difference, and a life that glorifies God in Heaven.

Without the Lord, our lives are worthless.

- Without fruit bringing glory to God, we have wasted our years.
- It is my understanding that the wood from a pruned grapevine is basically useless.
- I guess you could use them for decorations, but the old branches themselves were not good for anything—other than to be thrown into the fire, a picture Jesus paints very clearly in **verse 6**.

It would be so depressing to wake up someday and realize that our lives have been wasted.

- **Psalm 1** talks about a man who is like *“...a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither....”*
- On the other hand, **Psalm 1** says, *“The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”*

When we have a close relationship with the Lord, and when we bear fruit through a righteous life, we make our Father in Heaven look good.

- As Jesus said in **John 15:8**, His Father is *“glorified.”*

This very important thought is repeated at least twice in the New Testament.

- For example, in **Matthew 5:16**, Jesus said, *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*
- And then, in **1 Peter 2:12**, Peter said, *“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

### SUMMARY:

- First of all, we are invited into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ—staying close to the Lord through prayer and study.
- Secondly, we are encouraged to bear fruit—following Jesus’ example in our own lives.
- And finally, we are urged to live a life that brings glory to our Father in Heaven—bearing fruit makes our Father in Heaven look good to those around us.

### CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

As we close this morning’s lesson, I would like to point out one more detail from this passage: The word *“if”* is used three times—in **verses 6, 7, and 10**.

- This passage teaches that our salvation is conditional.
- Our Father has already made His sacrifice—the price for our sins has already been paid, but our salvation is conditional upon our response to that good news.
- It is completely up to us whether we will abide in the Lord and obey the Lord’s commandments.
- As we learned in **Revelation 3:20**, Jesus is standing at the door and knocking—waiting for the invitation to come in.
- According to **1 Peter 3:21**, we make that appeal to God through baptism.

If you are ready to be immersed right now, please let us know...

#### Comments or Questions?

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