

The True Vine

I Am

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John's Gospel, take your Bibles and turn to John's Gospel. Chapter 15 is where we will be today. Chapter 15. I'll be reading verses 1 through the end of verse 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 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. 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."

This is God's word. Let's pray.

Father, as my brother Gary mentioned this morning a phrase, turning our ears, Lord, in our song this morning in our praise time, we were quoting a Psalm where you turned your ear and you heard our cries. Lord, it is imperative that you turn our ears to hear your word, for you send your word to heal us and we have much to be healed, we have much need. So, Lord, today help us to see our neediness and our need to be in the true vine and that we are to live to the glory of God and the only way we can do that is to bear fruit, bear much fruit. Help us toward that end, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, let me ask you this morning: what do you need when you are facing the most difficult experience in your life? Now, you may not be there yet or you may be facing

that right now. Your most difficult need, what do you need the most when you are facing the most difficult experience in your life? I thought about the story at the end of the book of Genesis. At the end of the book of Genesis you find the story of Joseph. Joseph is dying. Joseph is the second in command in the country of Egypt and his father, his brothers, and all of his brothers' children, are there. They have been transplanted. They are not in the land of Israel, not in the Promised Land, they are in Egypt. They are far from their home and they have come there because Joseph has sent for them to come and Joseph has been taking care of them. He has been providing for them but now Joseph is dying and they are afraid and they are wondering, "What will happen to us now?" And Joseph said these words, "Don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your little ones." It was as if Joseph said, "Don't worry, I've got life insurance. I've got coverage for you. I'm going to be gone. I'm going to be gone but I'm going to provide for you. In my absence, I will provide for you and your little ones so don't be afraid." Then the writer said this, "Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

What do you need when you're facing the most difficult experience in your life? You need comfort. We are all going to experience difficulty. No way to get around it. What do we need the most in our most difficult experiences? We need comfort and I reflect back upon that story to say this: this is so similar to what is happening in our text today because in John 15, it is part of what is called the Farewell Discourse. It's when Jesus is saying farewell to his disciples. Jesus is speaking words of comfort to them. When you go back to John 13 and 14, and then 15, 16, 17, Jesus is pouring on the comfort because his disciples are getting ready to experience the greatest crisis they would ever face, and that is the crucifixion of their Lord.

You see, how are they going to carry on when Jesus leaves? How are they going to carry on and serve the Lord and bear fruit for his glory in his absence? And we might ask: how are we going to do it? How are we going to carry on? How are we, the church in the 21st century, how are we going to carry on in difficult troubling times? How are we going to carry on and serve the Lord and bear fruit in his absence until he comes? Jesus is giving his disciples and us the answer in our text today.

Now, most of you know in the last few weeks we have been looking at all of the "I am" statements recorded in the Gospel of John. We have now come to this one, "I am the true vine. I am the true vine." I wasn't there, you weren't there, but everything that Jesus said between chapter 15 and chapter 17 are spoken, all of his words are spoken between the Upper Room and the Garden of Gethsemane. You see, he has been meeting privately with his disciples. It's on the eve, it's on the eve of what will be his crucifixion. They have met together. They have had supper together. He has washed his disciples' feet. He has been speaking words of comfort to his disciples and letting them know, "I'm leaving. I'm going away." So they leave the Upper Room and they begin to go to the Garden of Gethsemane and along the way, they walk the pathways of the Mount of Olives, and it's not hard to read about these things and learn because along the way, along that pathway are vineyards and so we wonder, may Jesus as he walked along, may he have been using these object lessons, this imagery, to help teach and to comfort his disciples.

These 11 verses, I mean, as I read them I just reflected again that there is so much, so much that you could dive into in these 11 verses, far too much than we have the time available this morning, so what I want to do is I want to just focus on three things and the first one is this: our fullness of joy depends upon Jesus as the true vine. Now listen: our true joy, our fullness of joy. Look at verse 11 again. Look at it, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Now just stop and understand what's happening here. What he is saying is designed, it is calculated that his disciples might have joy and have it to the fullest even though they are getting ready to face their most difficult crisis in the life and following that they will face persecution. And so what do we need, what do we desperately need? We need joy. We need fullness of joy and our fullness of joy depends upon the fact that Jesus is the true vine.

Well, what does Jesus mean by being the true vine because unless we know that, we're just not going to really connect this. So what is Jesus alluding to when he says, "I am the true vine"? What does he mean? Well, in the Old Testament, in the Old Testament now, the vine is a common symbol used for the nation of Israel. Now, seal that down, okay? In the Old Testament, a vine is a symbol of the nation of Israel and we find a great example of this in Psalm 80. There are other examples but the is great. Look at this, "You," that's speaking of God, "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." Now what does all that mean? It is, again, imagery that God took his people, Israel, notice he brought a vine out of Egypt, that's speaking of bringing the people of Israel, bringing them out of Egyptian bondage, and drove out the nations of Canaan and planted Israel there, you see? And then it shows how he gives them every privilege. That's what God did, he took his people, he rescued them by grace, he is good to them and gave them all kinds of privileges, in order that they might bear the fruit of faithfulness and be a light unto the nations around them and therefore bring glory to God.

We said this before, if you've got this beautiful picture, we've got some artists in our congregation. Let's say we have a picture that someone painted and if you want this picture, you want everybody to see it, you don't hang it in the washroom. What do you do? You bring it out, you put it in the most prominent place in your house and then maybe you put a little light over the top of it so it will shine light on it so it will glorify it, you see. What God did in his grace, in his mercy, he plucked up these sinful people out of Egypt, like a vine he plucks them up and he takes them and he plants them in the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, with all the privileges and the benefits that you can imagine and said, "I want you, I am designing you to be a light to all the other nations." Because like we sang this morning, "He is good. I love the Lord, he is good. He is always good." And God said, "I want my goodness to shine through you all. I want people to see all the goodness I have poured into you. They are going to see it in you and then they are going to glorify me. They are going to realize who I am."

But that did not happen. That didn't happen. That's what God designed to happen but it didn't happen. In fact, the message of the Old Testament prophets focused mostly upon

how Israel failed to live as the true vine and to bear fruit. Jeremiah 2 is one example of this failure. God said, "Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?" In other words, this is supposed to be mind blowing. God is saying, "Look, I have done everything possible for you. I have been so gracious to you and look how you have turned out."

So Jesus comes along and he says, "I am the true vine." So what does he mean? Well, the most natural understanding of Jesus' statement is that he – listen – he embodies Israel's calling to be the true vine. Let me say it another way because I don't think you are understanding what I'm saying: Jesus is the fulfillment of all Israel was called to be. They were called to be faithful. They were called to be a light to others. They were called to be obedient and love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, but they failed and Jesus says, "I am the true vine." You see, when Israel failed to serve God as they ought, Jesus comes and says, "I am the true vine. I have achieved for you what you did not and could not achieve for yourself." And friends, that's right where we're at. If you're here this morning and you are saved by grace, if you are here this morning and you know Jesus in a saving way, it is because he has achieved for you what you could not and will not ever be able to achieve on your own. That's why we find in the book of Romans 5 these words, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

You see, it is imperative that if we are going to have joy, have salvation assurance, that our focus will be upon the one man's obedience because it is by and through the one man's obedience, Jesus Christ, the second Adam. The first Adam failed and because of his disobedience, we fell. Sin came. Death came into the world. So Jesus comes and he renders perfect obedience and through his perfect obedience, through his perfect righteousness, by and through him, many through trusting in him will be made righteous. Now, the simplest illustration of that would be in marriage. You know, imagine there are two people dating and one of them is extremely destitute, one of them just hasn't been able to get it together. They have made bad choice after bad choice after bad choice and basically they have nothing. But then the other party who loves them very much, has abundant wealth and they have worked hard and they have been faithful and they have made all the right decisions, and when they get married, what happens? The one who has nothing and doesn't deserve it now shares in the wealth, right? Right? Yeah.

You see, that's what it is for us. We didn't deserve all the spiritual blessings and the riches of Christ but through grace and through faith in him we have it. So stop looking to yourself. Stop looking to yourself and look to the one, the one who is the true vine, because if you keep looking at yourself, you're not going to have the fullness of joy, you'll only have the fullness of joy as you see that your joy entirely, completely, forever depends upon Jesus being the true vine. He has achieved for us what we can never achieve on our own.

Well, the second thing we need to see in this passage, there is so much but the second thing I want you to see is to glorify God we must be in the vine, bear fruit, abide and be pruned. Look at verse 8, put your finger on verse 8, "By this my Father is glorified, that

you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." In that simple statement, we are hearing what we are designed for, what we were made for, to glorify God; that it not be primarily about us but that first and fundamentally and always it is about him, living our lives to glorify him. So Jesus says, "God is going to be glorified. The Father is going to be glorified when you, his branches, bear fruit." So let's just walk through this for a moment because he talks about branches and fruit bearing, and abiding, and then pruning.

So first, branches. Jesus uses the imagery now of a vine and branches. Now he says he is the true vine and who are the branches? Well, it would be people, right? People are branches, all right? Now, we learn two things about branches. Branches are good for two things according to Jesus: they are good for fruit bearing or burning. Bearing fruit or burning and I just want you to let that sink in for just a moment, okay? That is a powerful statement. That is a powerful statement. Jesus is helping us to understand, you know, what we are here for, to glorify God, bear fruit to glorify God, and he likens us to branches and branches are good for two things: bearing fruit or burning. You see, branches that are in Christ, he tells us branches that are in the vine will bear fruit, okay?

Now, in Scripture to be in someone – now listen to me very carefully because what you hear more in the New Testament, you don't hear people saying, "Hey, I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian." What you hear Paul saying is that we are in Christ. We are in Christ. We are in Christ. So what does it mean to be in someone? It means to be in someone is to be a member of the people whom that someone represents. Okay, now, we'll come back to that in a minute. I'm going to do a test so listen to me closely. To be in someone is to be a member of the people, collective people whom that one someone represents. In verse 4, notice what it said, Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you." Look at the statement, "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in [me]." Powerful statement. What Jesus is saying is the branch cannot produce its own life, it derives life from the vine. Our spiritual life is derived outside of ourselves. We can't produce it. Notice he said cannot. Cannot. Understand that. So there is a branch, you know, branch, you're either bearing fruit and you only do that if you're in Christ, or its only fit for burning.

Now, next, fruit bearing. The vine produces its fruit through the branches. Now here's a question you ought to have, when you read this passage you ought to be saying, "I wonder what fruit Jesus is talking about. What fruit is he talking about?" You see, some will say it's the fruit of soul winning. Nothing wrong with soul winning. We certainly need to do that but I don't think that's it at all what's being referred to here. A second option is character development and I think that's certainly part of it, character development such as fruit of the Spirit. Fruit of the Spirit. We'll never be able to produce fruit of the Spirit unless we are in the vine, you see. But now, is that specifically what Jesus is talking about? And I just want to offer to you a bigger picture, okay? I think it includes soul winning, I certainly think it means character development because if we are connected to Christ, if we are in the vine, if we are truly in the vine, we are going to see the life of Christ reflected in how we live, you see? However, when the Old Testament uses the imagery of fruit, it is referring to lives lived faithfully. Now listen, Jesus said we must bear fruit, bear much fruit for the glory of God. What kind of fruit? Living faithful

lives to the glory of God, displaying the beauty of God in our lives lived faithfully. You see, isn't it interesting that when we hear the entrance call that will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," you see, the fruit that glorifies God is a life lived faithfully. Consistent. Ongoing. When times are good, when times are bad, when times are level, faithfulness. Paul said it is required in the stewards of God that they be faithful.

You see, this is the fruit, faithfulness, that Christ will produce through those who are in him. Christ was faithful. He is called the faithful one. That is the fruit. That is the primary fruit, the general fruit, the overall fruit, that Christ wants to produce in those who are in him, a life of faithfulness. But Christ goes on to say we can't do that unless 1, we are in him and we abide in him. Eleven times from verse 1 to the end of verse 11, Jesus refers to abiding in him. Now you should be saying at this point, okay, fruit is being faithful, living a life of faithfulness unto God, you should be going, "What is abiding? Now what does that mean?" Well, it is translated also "remaining; continuing in, continuing with." Here's a good definition, it means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that his life can work in and through us to produce the fruit of faithfulness.

Now we know what it means. Remain. Continue. Remain in fellowship with Christ, consistent, faithfully. How do you do that? What are the things that you do to make that possible? Well, we usually think in terms of these: read the Bible; pray; attend worship regularly; confess our sins regularly; a life of obedience; a life of sacrifice; a life of service to others. And all of these are good and they are certainly part of what it means to abide. All of these are good, in fact, without them you are not abiding, but it's not less than this but it's more than this. The bigger picture is this. I said a minute ago we'd do a test and here's the test. Remember, we said to be in someone, to be in Jesus is to be counted among the people whom Jesus represents. You see, Jesus is not saying, "Okay, I'm a vine over here for just your little branch and then I'm a vine over here for this person and this person and this person." No, no, no. Jesus is representative for many. Remember we said many may be made righteous. In other words, it's more than just about you and me, you see? In other words, when we become part of the church and you don't fundamentally become part of the church by just joining a church. God adds to the church those who are saved by grace through faith in Christ otherwise you're not in. I don't care how many have joined. However, when you are part of the church, you are joining a web of relationships with other members all of whom are connected with Christ. Now think this through with me because we're going somewhere. You see, our lives are woven together by the invisible bond of the Holy Spirit. This is not the Lions Club. This is not some secret organization. This is the church of the living God and we are bound together by the bonds of the Spirit of God. And all of that to say this: we all depend upon one another. In fact, generally speaking, this life of Christ that he's talking about, you know, producing fruit through us because we are in the vine, generally speaking the life of Christ comes to us mediated through other believers, meaning that each of us is a vehicle of Christ's life to one another.

Now I'll tell you what, just what I've said here, you may be having the Charlie Brown moment of, "Wah, wah, wah, wah," and do you know why? Because this kind of stuff falls flat. You know, I could talk about prosperity and I could talk about all kinds of

different things to get you. I know the buttons. I know the buttons to press but I'm not pressing them because I'm not here to be your button presser. And I realize that as I say these things, it's kind of like, "Wah, wah, wah, wah." So understand, Jesus goes on to say two times in verse 12 and 17, love one another. Love one another. So here's what I want to ask you, some diagnostic questions, okay? I want you to consider this morning in what sense are you doing that? If you're part of the church, let's just say you're part of Calvary Christian Center, in what sense are you fulfilling Jesus' command to love one another? In what sense are you doing that? You don't have to answer me. Just a diagnostic question. Just sitting down and just talking about things and just asking, "Hey, Jesus said to love one another. In what ways are you doing that? How are you fulfilling that?"

You see, at the risk of making you angry and I'm not here today to make you angry. I don't sit in my office and think, "How can I tick them off this week?" I really don't. So I'm not trying to make you angry but I know that for some of you this is going to be a slight bit of discomfort so let me put it this way: some of you attend here, you attend and I'm thankful for that and I hope you'll always attend, I hope you attend regularly for worship, but do you understand there is more to the Christian life than just attending, okay? So you attend and some of you attend but you come and you go. You come and you go. Now here is the way it works. You say, "Brother Van, he better be on today. That music better be right and people better be friendly to me and people better ..., and people better ..., and people better ..., or I'll just go somewhere else. I'll just go somewhere else until I get what I'm looking for. So we come and the buffet had better be laid out. It better be right and as long as it is, I'll come but then I'm going."

Let me say this. I'm not trying to hurt you. I'm not trying to hurt, I'm just simply asking some questions here. Do you come? Do you come and then you just get out of here as quick as you can? "I don't want to talk to anybody. I don't want to talk to anybody and if I do, if I talk to anybody, it's just going to be trivial stuff. It's going to be about the ballgame. It's going to be about the weather. It's going to be about my gun. It's going to be trivial stuff. It's going to be about my flowers. Just trivial blah, blah, blah." For some, it's not even that. You come and get out as quick as you can and you're not involved in any kind of small group. You never have been. You're not involved in any kind of Bible study. You never have been. You see, don't get mad at me, I'm just trying to point out that is a symptom of a far more serious problem. Do you see that? You're not interwoven with anybody and that's bad. That's not good.

But you see, here's my concern: you have convinced yourself that you can do what Christ says you cannot do. Christ said, "You can't bear fruit without me." And by the way, he includes his church that he died for. But you see, you've convinced yourself, "I can do this." Do you know why I know this? It's because I hear it all the time. I was with a young man this week outside of church, nobody here. I'm not telling any stories. He called me and I officiated at his wedding about four years ago and he called me and said, "Can we talk?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You know me. You know I'm a hard worker." And he is. He's a hard worker. He is a supervisor where he's at. He said, "I love to serve people. I want to do everything. I want to lay down my life for people. I want to lay down my life for my family. But do you know what? In the last two months, I'm so unhappy. I

am so unhappy. I don't know what's wrong with me." And so I thought, right away I think I know, I think I know but we'll go this route and I said, "How is your health? How is your health? How have you been?" "Yeah, I'm healthy. You know, I'm working out six days a week. You know, I'm really into that." I said, "Okay, then let me tell you what I think it could be: you were born, you were created to worship God, you were created to know and worship him through his Son Jesus Christ and, buddy, all of a sudden here comes the wall." And immediately he said to me, "Look, I don't think I need church to connect with God. I can connect with God just fine without the church." Do you see what I'm saying? It's this mentality that says, "Look, I can do it myself." He has convinced himself that he can do what Christ said he cannot do.

I heard about a group of people who were asked to draw the most beautiful picture that they could think of, the most beautiful scenery. There were like a dozen people and one of them drew a waterfall. One of them drew a sun setting. In all 12 pictures – listen – in all 12 pictures there were no people. No people. You see, that's the kind of world we live in. That's the kind of fallenness that has gripped us. "It's just me. It's just me. It's just me. My beauty is my sunset. My stars in the sky. No people. I don't want any people around me." Well, friends, let me tell you something, Jesus Christ is representative of many of the church and if you're going to draw on the life of Christ, it involves being mediated through Christ's people. I don't know how many times in the 36 years now that Christ has mediated his life and his grace and his love to me through the people of God.

Okay, branches, fruit bearing, abiding, pruning. Pruning. Look at verse 2, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes." Let's say you are here today and you're saying, "Oh, Brother Van, I know God loves me." I remember talking to a young lady, this has been almost 21 years ago now. She walked away from her husband. Didn't want to be married anymore. Laid up in the bed with some other man. My wife and I went to visit her and began to talk to her about her sin and she let us know right away, she said, "God loves me." She said, "The other day I was sitting in front of the television just watching TV and I could just feel God's love, his arms all around me." And I remember telling her, I said, "I don't know what you felt but it wasn't the love of God. It wasn't the love of God patting you on the head saying everything is okay."

Now you may be here this morning and you say, "Oh, I know God loves me. I know he loves me." Well, let me ask you something, if he starts coming at you with these [clipping noise], what are you going to say then? What are you going to say then when he starts coming at you with these because let me tell you something, if you are his and you are bearing fruit, he's going to come at you with these to prune you that you will bear more fruit. That's what Jesus is saying and, you see, sometimes we get really ticked off with God when he comes with these. We think, "There is no way he can love me. There is no way possible he can love me. Why is he doing this to me?"

You see, my dad used to grow grapes. We lived in a subdivision, yards are not too big there and so about three quarters of the yard was taken up with grape vines and I remember every year my dad would come out and prune the grapes and it looked like a

disaster had hit. I mean, you've got to learn how to do this. Some vineyards, they pay people and train them for years before they turn them loose because, "Did I do too much? Did I leave too much?" because the goal, the goal is we've got to get this thing to bear more fruit, you see? And I'd walk out there and I'd say, "Boy, what a disaster." But you know, my heavenly Father is an expert pruner. Your heavenly Father is an expert pruner. You've got to trust that. We've got to trust that together. You see, it's not just about removing the bad stuff but often the Father removes good stuff so that anything that prevents fruitfulness is removed.

Now you might say, "Okay, look, I just don't like this. I don't like that kind of God. That's not my kind of God." Well, then you're not trusting in the God of the Bible, okay? So you say, "Okay, I don't like it. I just don't like it. I just don't like it." Well, okay, consider this: the greatest judgment that God can bring on you is to leave you alone. Do you understand that? For God just to say, "Okay, you don't like it? Okay," and just step away. The greatest judgment that God can bring on you is just to step back and leave you alone. On the other hand, on the other hand, your heavenly Father is never nearer to you than when he is pruning you. I watched my dad prune the grapes and he would get right down, he would get down real close. He was right close to the plant. He was right close to the branch.

You see, your heavenly Father, my heavenly Father, is never closer to us than when he is pruning us, besides, it's when we get pruned that we begin to truly draw on the vine. Now think about this. You get pruned back, look at that little old plant, you walk out there and you go, "What happened? All this stuff got pruned away, what happened?" It's all toward the goal of bearing more fruit, however, that's when this little plant really really begins to draw on the vine, to draw life. And you see, here's the point: you may be being pruned right now and you're just all out of sorts and I understand, you know, it's not comfortable at all. You're getting pruned and you're wondering, "What in the world is going on?" Listen, oftentimes what we'll find is this: when we get pruned, we'll start drawing on something, we'll always try to draw on something. If Christ is your true vine, you can draw on him and you're going to bear fruit and you're going to make it, but if your true vine is your job, your stuff, your relationships in your life, you're not going to make it. You're not going to make it. So pruning is a good thing because it will determine who we are really having as our true vine.

Finally, one last point. I'll be quick. Question: are you connected to the true vine or the vine of the earth? There is some sobering imagery of the vine that we find in the book of Revelation. Let's look at these words together. "And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, 'Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.' So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God." So you're thinking, "Hm, a person is either in the true vine of the Lord or they are in the vine of the earth. Which one?"

Now I anticipate some to say, "Jesus. Jesus, because I went to the altar and I prayed the prayer. I asked Jesus to come in." Do you know that you can accept Jesus with a heart that is actually rejecting him and not even realize it? Here's what I mean. Just think with me. Let's say that your life is a cluster of buildings. Let's say that your life is represented by a complex or cluster of buildings. In one building is your public life and people come and they go through that building. It's your public life. Then there is another building that represents your private life and only you go there. Everybody is out. Just you. Then there is another building that represents your marriage and your family. Well, it's in that building that you're having some trouble. The other buildings are okay you think, but this one building I've got a problem. You know, my marriage is not going really well and you're scared, you don't want your marriage to fall apart. So you start thinking, "Hm, wait a minute. I've heard somebody say Jesus can help me. Yeah, Jesus can help me." So eventually you get so low that you humble yourself and you bow your head and you pray. And I can remember over the years, old building, this building, I can remember getting an invitation for people to come and seeing people come and just weary and wailing before God only to find out later that what was really going on was their marriage was all upset, family is upset. You see, when things are not good at home, everything else stinks. When everything is good at home, everything else can be falling apart and that's okay, you see? But I found that oftentimes a marriage falling apart, family life is in trouble, and there comes, "Oh, I'm going to cry before God. I'm going to pray. I want to ask Jesus into my heart. I want Jesus to come. I want him to come." And then things seem like okay. They get up and things move on but then after a while, as time goes by nothing changes. It doesn't seem to stick.

So the question is what happened? What happened? Remember, your life is a series of buildings and so what you did was you rang up Jesus and said, "Hey, Janitor Jesus, hey, Janitor Jesus, here's a key to this room over here. Would you go and clean the mess up for me? My marriage is a mess, would you clean it up? Get the kids all right? My spouse okay? Clean it all up, Janitor Jesus." So you think that Jesus is your janitor. I'm not trying to make you mad, I'm just asking you to think about it because there are many people, many people that want to know Jesus as Janitor Jesus. "Come in and clean this room up," but they will never give him the master key of their life. You see, they want to negotiate with Jesus but Jesus is not a negotiator. He either has the full key of your entire life or nothing at all. So there is such a way to say, "I accept Jesus," but all the while we are really just rejecting Jesus and we don't realize it; to think Jesus just wants your one room, that you're really doing him a favor and you're really glorifying him by handing him the janitor key to one room. That's not receiving Jesus at all.

So are you in Jesus the vine or are you in the vine of the earth? You see, these passages are kind of sobering because when you read these verses, it always comes up: can a true believer lose their salvation? It always comes up in these verses. There are some in the church that said, "Yeah, man, you'll lose your salvation." No, you cannot lose it. You cannot lose it, absolutely not. Look at verse 6 just to show you why this comes up. Verse 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." Look at verse 2, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." I just want to weigh in on this for just a moment. You

say, "Is this talking about a true believer losing their salvation?" Let me just make it clear Jesus said these words, not me, he said, "All sins will be forgiven the children of men." In other words, if you're here today and you wonder, "It sounds like I could do something wrong and do something and I'm just whacked off and thrown into the fire." No, that's not what Jesus is talking about because all sins, all sins, no matter how bad, no matter how ugly, all confessed sins, all confessed and repented of sins will be forgiven the children of men. So don't think for a minute, "I've done sinned my way out of grace." If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to cleanse us and forgive us of our unrighteousness. So these passages are not talking about somebody who is in and then kind of stepped over so-and-so line and, whack, they're gone. No. However, at the same time there is no hope for an apostate. There is no hope for an apostate, someone who just walks away from Christ and says, "Not trusting in Christ. Don't need Christ. Don't want Christ. Don't care." Because if you turn away from Christ, you turn away from the only hope. The only hope.

So think about it this way: Judas, remember Judas, he was visibly in Jesus but he was not actually in Jesus at all. You see, there are many people in churches, they are in church, they are in religion, they are visibly but they are not actually in Jesus, and I think this is what Jesus is referring to here.

So let me close this way: you are either in the true vine bearing fruit unto the glory of God which is your destiny, or you are in the vine of the earth and you are facing the wrath of God. There are no two ways about it. There is going to come a point according to the Bible, it's like a sickle, that imagery that's going to sweep through, sweep through and you're gone and you're into the fire, you're in the destruction, you're into the wrath of God. There is only one thing that can save you. It's not religion. It's not you dressing yourself up and trying to fix yourself all up. No, your only hope is in the true vine who was cut off from the land of the living so that you would not have to be. Jesus who bore the wrath of God in your place, the wrath of God that is going to come about, he bore that in your place so that you would not have to. He was cut off that you only have to be cut back and bear more fruit. Think about that. He was cut off completely from the land of the living so that through faith in him we have to be cut back so that we would flourish and bear much fruit in faithfulness.

Friends, your joy, my joy, your eternal salvation, my eternal salvation, depends upon being in Jesus, the true vine. Give him the master key. The master key.

Let's bow our heads.