

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 8-19-12 AM NOTES
"THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES"
JOHN 15:1-5
#59 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through John"

John 14:1 (NKJV) "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."

Matthew 13:45-46 (NKJV) "⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

I. The Vine (v. 1)

A. The Vine's Symbolism in the Old Testament

Psalms 80:8 (NKJV) "You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it."

Isaiah 5:7a (NKJV) "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel..."

Jeremiah 2:21 (NKJV) "Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?"

B. The Vine's Realization in the New Testament

"Hitherto Israel had been the vine, into which every one that would worship the true God must be grafted. But from henceforward they were to be planted into the profession of Christ."

—J. B. Lightfoot

II. The Branches (vv. 2-5)

A. The Purpose of the Branches (v. 2)

Hosea 14:8b (NKJV) "Your fruit is found in Me."

Philippians 1:11 (NKJV) "being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

1. Making Disciples of Christ Is Fruit

Romans 1:13 (NKJV) "Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles."

2. A Holy Life Is Fruit

Romans 6:22 (NKJV) "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."

3. Good Works Are Fruit

Titus 3:14 (NKJV) “And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”

Colossians 1:10 (NKJV) “that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Titus 2:14b (NKJV) “...purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.”

4. Holy Spirit Produced Christ-Like Character Is Fruit

Galatians 5:22-23a (NKJV) “²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control.”

B. The Preparation of the Branches (vv. 2-3)

1. The Father Lifts Up the Branches (v. 2a)

2. The Father Prunes the Branches (v. 2b)

Katharidzo

a. It Means to Cut Back

Psalms 119:67 (NKJV) “Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.”

Psalms 119:71 (NKJV) “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.*”

“Trial, to speak plainly, is the instrument by which our Father in Heaven makes Christians more holy. By trial He calls out their passive graces, and proves whether they can suffer His will as well as do it. By trial He weans them from the world, draws them to Christ, drives them to the Bible and prayer, shows them their own hearts, and makes them humble. This is the process by which He [*prunes*] them, and makes them more fruitful. The lives of the saints in every age, are the best and truest comment on the text. Never, hardly, do we find an eminent saint, either in the Old Testament or the New, who was not purified by suffering, and, like his Master, a ‘man of sorrows.’”

—J. C. Ryle

b. It Means to Cleanse

1 John 1:9 (NKJV) “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness.”

C. The Part of the Branches (vv. 4-5)

1. The Branch Must Remain Dependent

2. The Branch Must Maintain Availability

Philippians 1:21a (NKJV) “For to me, to live *is* Christ...”

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 8-19-12 AM
"THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES"
JOHN 15:1-5
#59 in Series, "Verse by Verse through John"

Allow me to remind you of the context. It is the night before the crucifixion of Christ. Jesus has celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples; Judas, the traitor has gone out from their presence to arrange Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. It had finally sunk in on the disciples that Jesus is leaving them and they were distraught. In chapter 14 Jesus focused on consoling His disciples. He told them in **John 14:1 (NKJV)** "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." He told them about the coming Holy Spirit and the peace He was giving them. When we get to chapters 15-16, the focus is more on instruction than consolation. There was certainly some instruction in chapter 14, but in chapters 15 & 16 almost everything Jesus says is in some way teaching or instructing them. Jesus was the master teacher. He often took things that people were very familiar with and used the familiar to explain a more complicated truth. For instance, **Matthew 13:45-46 (NKJV)** ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Everyone understood what a valuable pearl was. They understood exactly how the merchant would feel when he found this valuable pearl. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like that valuable pearl. In John 15:1-8 Jesus takes something that everyone listening to Him would be very familiar with. In a first century mid-eastern agricultural society, everyone was familiar with a vineyard. All of the disciples would understand what a "vinedresser" or "vineyard keeper" (HCSB) was and what he did. Every disciple would know that a good vineyard was not determined by how big the grape branches were but by the quality of the fruit. Jesus takes this which was familiar and teaches His disciples the truth concerning how they would bear fruit when He was gone from them. As we will see next week, He also used this picture of a vineyard to teach them about prayer that will be answered and how to glorify God. Let's learn about a fruitful life by looking at what Jesus said about grapevines, grape branches and the work of the vinedresser.

I. The Vine (V1)

Though we can't be dogmatic, it seems likely that Jesus and His disciples between chapter 14 and 15 left the upper room to head for the Garden of Gethsemane. John 14 ends with Jesus saying in **verse 31b (NKJV)** "...Arise, let us go from here." On the way to Gethsemane they may have passed the temple. There would have been a full moon since it was Passover and perhaps they saw the huge carving of a vine on the temple gates. This carving was overlaid with gold and it is estimated that today it would have a value of about 12 million dollars. That may have been what Jesus was pointing to when He said "I am the true vine..."

A. The Vine's Symbolism in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the vine symbolized the nation Israel. Just as the eagle is America's symbol, one of the symbols of Israel was a grape vine. There was a vine on their coins that were issued by the Maccabeans in the second century before Christ. There are many references in the Old Testament to Israel being symbolized as a grape vine. **Psalms 80:8 (NKJV)** "You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it." **Isaiah 5:7a (NKJV)** "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel..." In **Jeremiah 2:21 (NKJV)** God is speaking to rebellious Judah and says, "Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?"

B. The Vine's Realization in the New Testament

Jesus calls Himself the "true vine". This use of the word is not true as opposed to false, but true in the sense of being the perfect, divine, eternal vine. "True" means that all others were shadows or types. Jesus says, in other words, that He is the genuine, eternal vine. Israel was the type or shadow of the true vine. The Bible commentator, J. B. Lightfoot in the 1800's said, "Hitherto Israel had been the vine, into which

every one that would worship the true God must be grafted. But from henceforward they were to be planted into the profession of Christ” [Quoted in J. C. Ryle, “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels”, volume four, page 99]. Jesus is the true vine. Israel had failed to obey God and was being temporarily set aside. Now blessing and fruit would come through being united to Christ. Jesus chose the vine / branches picture for several reasons. The main reason is that it illustrates the close relationship between Jesus and His disciples and how dependent His disciples are on Him to bear fruit.

In this illustration, the father is the “vinedresser” or the “gardener” (NIV) or the “vineyard keeper” (HCSB). The responsibility of the vineyard keeper was to create an environment where the branches had the potential to bear the best and most fruit. We will see more of the Father’s work with the branches in a moment.

II. The Branches (V2-5)

The branches in Jesus’ illustration are those who are united to Christ by savingly believing in Him. The branches are helpless to produce fruit on their own. They receive their life from the vine to which they are attached.

A. The Purpose of the Branches (V2)

It is obvious that the purpose of the branches is to bear fruit. Let’s be very clear that the purpose of the branch is not to produce fruit. Branches cannot produce the fruit; branches are simply “fruit hangers”. God says in **Hosea 14:8b (NKJV)** “...your fruit is found in Me.” Really, all a grape branch is good for is bearing fruit. You can’t build a house out of grape branches; you can’t build furniture out of a grape branches; in Israel, they weren’t even allowed to use grape branches in the fire to burn the sacrifices. Branches are for the sole purpose of bearing fruit. A true branch may go through lean periods of little fruit, but that is when the Father (the vinedresser) works on them so that their fruitlessness is not a permanent condition. Every branch bears some fruit.

That brings up the basic question: What is fruit? No one would argue with the statement that every Christian is to bear fruit, but what is fruit? Let’s look first at a general answer and then see a specific answer. Generally, fruit is the outflow of Christ’s life. The life of Christ (the vine) flows through the branch and the result is fruit that reflects the life of the vine. The Christian life is Christ’s life flowing through us (our unique personalities) to produce fruit that is Christ-like. **Philippians 1:11 (NKJV)** “being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” What does that fruit look like specifically?

1. Making Disciples of Christ Is Fruit – **Romans 1:13 (NKJV)** “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.” The context indicates that Paul desired to come to Rome that he might lead people to Christ and then disciple them. That is fruit. The fruit of a disciple of Jesus Christ is another disciple. That is the basis of our TELL training. It is not just training Christians to lead others to Christ but to make maturing Disciples of Christ.

2. A Holy Life Is Fruit – **Romans 6:22 (NKJV)** “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

3. Good Works Are Fruit – **Titus 3:14 (NKJV)** “And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” **Colossians 1:10 (NKJV)** “that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being **fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God”. Good works cannot earn salvation, but they are the fruit of salvation. Titus 2:14 describes Christians as people who are “zealous for good works” and those good works when done in the power of Christ and with the motive to glorify Christ are fruit.

4. Holy Spirit Produced Christ-like Character Is Fruit – **Galatians 5:22-23a (NKJV)** “²² But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control...” If you had to pick 9 qualities that describe Christ’s life, you couldn’t do any better these 9 in Galatians 5:22-23. This is a nine fold description of what Christ’s life flowing through us looks like. Each of these qualities finds their ultimate manifestation in the person of Christ.

The purpose of branches is to bear fruit – the fruit of those we have discipled, the fruit of a holy life, the fruit of good works, and primarily the fruit of the Spirit of Christ who manifests Christ’s life through us.

B. The Preparation of the Branches (V2-3)

In these verses we see how the Father (the vinedresser) works with the branches to enable and equip them to move to the next level of fruit bearing. There are different levels of maturity of the fruit. Notice in verse 2 that there is “fruit” and “more fruit”. When you get to verse 5 you see “much fruit”. That speaks of spiritual maturity. As we grow in our walk with Christ, we bear more and better quality fruit. The Father matures us in two ways:

1. The Father Lifts Up the Branches (V2a)

In my Bible, there is a little “1” beside that phrase “takes away”. That means that there is a marginal alternative translation. If you look at the alternative translation it says “lifts up”. I believe that this is the translation that best fits the context. In verse six, Jesus deals with those who are unfruitful branches but here in verse 2 He is speaking of branches which have gotten in the dirt and the dirt is hindering them from bearing fruit. This is exactly what happens in literal vineyards with branches that have gotten in the dirt and sometimes are no longer exposed to the sun and sufficient air. Grapes are not like squash or pumpkins or cucumbers that develop well on the ground. Grapes must hang free. Any branch that falls onto and runs along the ground is unproductive. When the vinedresser finds these fallen branches, he lifts them up and either puts a rock under them or uses some other method of raising them up to get the air and the sun. The application here is obvious. When we are beat down or have fallen into the dirt of the world system around us, our loving Father comes to us and by His grace lifts us up. Have you ever experienced that? It is a precious experience to be discouraged and beat down and weary and experience the Father, by means of His word as we read it, as another believer He sends to us speaks of the Word to us, a Scriptural song He brings to mind, or any number of other messengers of the Word to reach down and lift us out of the dirt and infuse us with His grace and give us the strength to go on.

2. The Father Prunes the Branches (V2b)

The word translated “prunes” is the Greek word “katharidzo”. We get the word “catharsis” from that. In English, the word “prune”, means to cut back the branch so it bears more grapes. The Greek word has that meaning plus more. It means the following:

a. It Means to Cut Back – The goal of the vinedresser is not to grow big impressive looking branches; the goal is to bear more quality fruit. When all the nourishment from the vine goes to simply grow a bigger branch, there is little fruit. So the vinedresser cuts back the branch so that it can bear more fruit. Wow, do you see the illustration. Our loving Father is more concerned with your fruitfulness than He is with your making a name for yourself or living a comfortable, pain free, problem free life. He begins to prune us to cut away the areas of our life that are unlike Christ. Pruning is painful. Going through trials and heartaches is not something that we would choose, but we desire to bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit and that is not possible apart from the Father’s pruning. The Psalmist understood this truth. We could sub the word “pruned” for “afflicted”. He said in **Psalms 119:67 (NKJV)** “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.” He went on to say in **Psalms 119:71 (NKJV)** “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.*” God prunes us by allowing trials in our life. These trials are not pleasant, but they are necessary. Sometimes the afflictions serve not to remove bad things, but good things that are robbing us of the best things. Dr. J. C. Ryle said this about the verse we are looking at: “Trial, to speak plainly, is the instrument by which our Father in Heaven makes Christians more holy. By trial He calls out their passive graces, and proves whether they can suffer His will as well as do it. By trial He weans them from the world, draws them to Christ, drives them to the Bible and prayer, shows them their own hearts, and makes them humble. This is the process by which He [‘prunes’] them, and makes them more fruitful. The lives of the saints in every age, are the best and truest comment on the text. Never, hardly, do we find an eminent saint, either in the Old Testament or the New, who was not purified by suffering, and, like his Master, a ‘man of sorrows’” [J. C. Ryle, “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels” Volume Four, Page 97]. Without pruning, I fear that we would be prideful and all branch and little fruit. Pruning means to cut back.

b. It Means to Cleanse – Branches get dirty and it hinders their capacity to bear fruit. The vinedresser takes water and cleanses the branch from dirt, insects, or moss. This debris pictures sin that is harbored in a believer’s life that must be cleansed to allow fruit to flourish. In verse three he is saying that we don’t need to be saved again; we just need to be cleansed from the debris of the world that has attached itself to us. This is saying the same thing as John 13:1-10. Several times in Scripture the Word of God is pictured as water that cleanses us (Ephesians 5:26). The Father allows His corrective discipline to come into our life to bring us to repentance and confession so that the debris is removed and the fruit will not be hindered. **1 John 1:9 (NKJV)** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to **cleanse us** from all unrighteousness.”

We have seen the purpose of the branches and the preparation of the branches to bear more fruit.

C. The Part of the Branches (V4-5)

What is the part the branch plays in bearing fruit? It is just one thing – abide in the vine, Jesus. Remember that the branch is helpless when it comes to producing fruit. The fruit is produced by the vine, not the branches. The invitation by Jesus to sinners is “come to Me”, but the invitation (command) to His disciples is “Abide in Me”. The word “abide” is used 10 times in the first 10 verses. What does it mean to abide in Jesus? That is a vital question to answer because the bearing of fruit depends on our abiding in Him. The word itself simply means to remain, to stay, to dwell in, or continue in Him. As the true vine, Jesus alone is sufficient to produce the fruit through us that we long to see. This “abiding” in practical every day living means two things:

1. The Branch Must Remain Dependent

To abide in Him means that we strive to be **constantly conscious** of our desperate need for Christ to empower us and produce fruit through us. This constant dependence involves also the awareness that without Him we can do nothing. Some people argue with that and say, “We certainly can’t reach our full potential, but we can do some things”. That may be man’s evaluation, but God’s evaluation of everything done apart from abiding in Jesus is that it is nothing. God’s evaluation is the only evaluation that counts. From an earthly perspective, we can accomplish much and even receive accolades concerning our great “work for the Lord”, but if it was done in our strength and without conscious dependence on Christ and His Spirit in us, God looks at it and says “nothing”. This is one reason that a quiet time is so important. It sets our mind on the fact at the beginning of the day that we are totally dependent on Him. As we do our job, care for our family, carry on conversations, witness, do ministry, we are consciously living in dependence on Him. To abide in Him is an approach to life that sees every demand on me to be a demand on Christ to whom I am united. I simply look to Him for His strength, His wisdom, His enabling grace. Our question for the demands on us is not, “Am I sufficient for this?” The question is, “Is He sufficient for this?” That mindset and way of life is what it means to abide in Him. The result is that He begins to produce true fruit through you as you work, spend time with your children, participate in recreation, and do ministry – a life of fruit bearing.

2. The Branch Must Maintain Availability – A branch doesn’t detach from the vine and then connect again when it needs some sap and nourishment. It stays attached to the vine, always available for the life of the vine to flow through the branch. Even so, abiding in Christ means that we are always available to speak, serve, confront in love, deal with a crisis, or whatever He allows to come our way. It is to remain yielded to Him always.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the verse in the Bible that best describes a life of abiding in Christ is **Philippians 1:21a (NKJV)** “For to me, to live *is* Christ...” This is the intended Christian life for every true disciple of Jesus Christ!