

## ‘I AM the True Vine’

We’re going to look at the ‘I AM the true vine’ declaration of Jesus today which is found in **John 15**. A visitor from Holland was chatting with his American friend and was jokingly explaining about the red, white and blue in the Netherlands flag. ‘Our flag symbolises our taxes,’ he said. ‘We get red when we talk about them, white when we get our tax bill, and blue after we pay them.’ ‘That’s the same with us,’ the American said, ‘only we see stars, too.’

We all know that the national emblem of Scotland is the thistle and the national emblem of Wales is the leek and they both symbolise something about their country. But what was the national symbol of Israel as a nation during the days of Jesus? It was the vine.

**Psalm 80:8+9** “You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.” Down through Jewish history the vine became the symbol of Israel and it was during the Maccabees period of history, the symbol of the vine was moulded on the coins of Israel. And so, when the Bible talks about ‘temple money’, it was the coins with the vine engraved on them.

The symbol was over the main doors of the synagogues and Josephus in describing Herod’s Temple in Jesus’ day says, ‘Under the crown—work was spread out a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and the workmanship of which were an astonishing sight to the spectators’.

I can imagine the prophet Isaiah walking through the market place in Jerusalem. People are busy selling their wares, vegetables and wool and as he walks along he sees a vendor selling stringed instruments. He picks up an instrument and begins to chant a song, the song that we read about in **Isaiah 5**.

**Isaiah 5:1-7** “I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ‘Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.’ The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”

Isaiah’s ‘loved one’ is God Himself and ‘His vineyard’ was the nation of Israel. And notice how he closes his song, he says that Israel is a ‘degenerate vine’. God looked for justice, but found bloodshed, He looked for ‘righteousness’ but found ‘a cry of distress.’ In other words, the vineyard failed to produce righteousness. Jeremiah says the same thing in one sentence in **Jeremiah 2:21** “I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?”

In **Ezekiel 15:1-6** and **Ezekiel 19:10-14** we read that the vine was a symbol of the spiritual relationship between God and Israel. The fruit of righteousness was to honour and glorify God. When you look at a vine branch, you know it’s no good for making anything. You can’t really use it for fuel because it flames up like paper and is gone instantly. You can’t use it to make furniture, because it was too soft and no good for timber. You can’t use it as a tent peg because it crumbles or flexes when you hit it.

In other words, the vine branches have only one purpose and that’s to produce rich, delicious fruit. Israel as a nation had become a wild, rotten grape and **Ezekiel** tells us she was ripe for the great winepress of the wrath of God. And so, whenever Jesus refers to the vineyard we may not understand what He was talking about but the Jews certainly did.

Now remember that Jesus and His disciples had just celebrated the Passover, Judas has left the group to set up the betrayal. Jesus and the eleven remaining disciples left Jerusalem, and went down into the Kidron Valley and up the slope of the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane. And as they walk along the trail, Jesus and the disciples pass through the vineyards that surround the city. Along the trail are twisted grapevines which showed the scars from recent pruning’s.

But there's something else they could see in the distance, they see the temple, and because it's always a full moon at Passover time, they see something shining in the night. They can see in the distance the temple gate. Now please remember the temple gate was huge, so huge it took twenty men on each door to open and close it because it was seventy cubits high, roughly 32 meters.

But on this gate which led from the porch to the holy place, there was a huge carving on the gate, [would anyone like to guess what the carving was?](#) There was a richly carved vine which extended as a border and decoration. The branches, shoots, and leaves were made of the finest gold, the stalks of the grapes were the same height of an adult man. The grapes hanging upon them were made of costly jewels, this vine had a sacred meaning in the eyes of the Jews.

The vine, the symbol of Israel, what a sight this must have been that moon lit evening when Jesus was walking with His disciples, through the vineyard. I can imagine Jesus picking up a cutting from the vine, looking at the temple gate, turning to His disciples. And saying, **'You know how Israel is pictured as a vine which is to produce refreshing fruit. Well, she failed. I AM the authentic Vine. I AM the true and genuine Vine as opposed to a mere copy or symbol. I AM the fulfilment of all that this symbol suggests. I AM the Vine, the true One.'**

Jesus is the fullest realisation of the hope of Israel, of her expectations, of what God intended her to be. Israel as a vine never achieved her goal, she was a failure, but the good news is, **'I AM'** came as the **'True Vine'** and accomplished all that God intended His Messiah to do. You see, Jesus was drawing a sharp contrast between the degenerate vine of Israel and Himself. He transferred the privileges and responsibilities from the Jews to Himself.

**John 15:1+2 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."** Now Jesus says He is the vine, God the Father is the gardener and we're God's great vineyard. But notice that God expects us to produce His fruit in His vineyard. Just as the viticulturist, someone who must cleanse the vineyard, our heavenly Father must cleanse us, so we will bear more fruit.

He finds a branch that is producing fruit and He begins to cut it back so it will bear more fruit. His goal is to cleanse the branches that remain, in order to produce fruitfulness. Notice what Jesus says in **John 15:2 "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."**

**John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."**

**John 15:8 "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."** The whole emphasis is on **'fruit,' 'more fruit,' 'much fruit'** and **'much fruit'** again. In other words, God won't stop pruning until He sees fruit! He cuts away the dead wood, diseased and rotten portion of our lives.

And loved ones, that's where most of us try to stop God, we like growing but we don't like the pain the pruning creates. [Why I am going through all these trials? Why am I suffering so much as a Christian?](#) He's allowing us to go through all these things because it's the only way we can grow. He cuts off the sin in our lives, the parts of our lives which are rotten with selfishness so that we will produce righteousness. I've known people who have endured intense suffering but after they have come through that trial, they're glowing with the radiance beauty of Jesus.

**James 1:2-4** says, **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."** Now notice that phrase, **'let perseverance finish its work.'** You see, we want to get out of the trial early, we want to get through them as quick as possible. But James says, **'No! we need to let our trials take their course, in order of us to become mature and complete, lacking nothing.'**

In other words, trials help us grow and God's pruning process is a cleansing process. Jesus said in **John 15:8 "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."** Listen loved ones, God will do whatever cleansing is necessary to produce His kind of fruit in us but we need to allow Him to prune us. Our Father finds a branch that's beginning to bear fruit, and He cuts it back, trims off its shoots, so we will bear more fruit.

[But exactly how does He do that? How does God prune us?](#)

Jesus says in **John 15:3** “**You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you**”. The Father uses the circumstances and situations in our lives to make us obey and hear His Word. He uses the Scriptures to confront our worldly desires and selfishness. And slowly but surely God’s Word starts to work in our hearts, pruning and cleansing and causing us to bear fruit. The Father’s pruning knife cuts off the old shoots of our old life within us.

Now remember the whole purpose of the vine is to produce fruit. **Hosea 10:1+2** “**Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones. Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones.**” God expected Israel to produce luscious, beautiful, rich choice grapes of righteousness but instead, she produced sour, rotten, stinking, tasteless grapes. God was looking for justice and righteousness, instead He found oppression, cruelty, exploitation of men.

So, let me ask you, with all this talk of fruit, **what is the fruit, God is trying to produce in our life?** You see, Jesus is the Vine and the fruit of the vine will be the natural outflow of the life of the vine. In other words, when we’re united with Him, we are identified with Him. We produce His wine, we reproduce Christ, He works in us what He produces.

But the fruit producing process is a natural one, it’s the most natural thing in the world for a fruit tree to produce fruit. Ask yourself, **when was the last time you saw a fruit tree going through labour pains?** I’ve never seen an orange tree pushing and squeezing, trying to produce an orange. No, it’s naturally produced, it’s not forced, a healthy tree will produce healthy fruit.

**But how do we produce fruit?** Well in **John 15** Jesus uses the word, ‘**remain**’ 11 times, which is the Greek word ‘**meno**’. And it means to remain in union, maintain a living communion, to maintain unbroken fellowship with another but maintaining that union shouldn’t be an effort for us. Now it took an effort for you to come here today, **didn’t it?** But **how much effort does it take for you to stay where you are in your seats?** None. It takes no effort to stay in Christ because if we stay in Christ, we will naturally grow and that’s how we glorify God.

**And what is the fruit He’s trying to produce in us?** God expects the fruit of the Holy Spirit produced in our lives. But it’s only by Jesus living in us can He produce the fruit of the Spirit. When God examines our lives, He expects to see **Galatians 5:22+23**, “**love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**” He expects to see the fruit of Christ-likeness, the fruit is the righteousness of God in the heart, it’s the likeness of Christ.

**John 15:4+5** “**Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”**”

Remaining in Christ is our responsibility in Christ because when I’m remaining, I’m believing, reckoning on and persevering. You see loved ones, a vine branch is lifeless and useless unless it remains attached to the vine. It can produce grapes only as it remains attached because the moment it’s severed, it begins to die and becomes fruitless. Believers in Christ can produce the fruit of the Spirit only if they remain attached to Jesus and draw their life in the Spirit from Him.

The apostle Paul expressed the same truth in **Galatians 2:20** when he wrote, “**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.**” It’s only the believer who remains in Christ who can say what Paul said in **Philippians 4:13**, “**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me**”. We get all our strength and everything we need for life, only when we stay attached to Christ.

**But what happens if we don’t remain in Christ? What are the consequences of being detached from Christ?** I can imagine Jesus speaking to His disciples and as they are talking, Jesus points over to one of the many small fires in the vineyard which were lit to get rid of the dead wood. And He says, **John 15:6** “**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.**”

Nothing good can come out of not remaining in Christ loved ones, and notice that Jesus says, “**they gather them**”, **who are they?** The “**they**” are the harvesters who represent the angels which Jesus describes in the parable of the wheat and weeds in **Matthew 13:24-40**.

**Now, is there any evidence that God is producing His fruit in us?**

The **first** piece of evidence that we're remaining in Christ is seen when **'God answers our prayers according to His will'**. John 15:7 **"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."**

In other words, you will see God at work in your life but if you can't see God working in, others should. If we're remaining in Christ, our prayers will be **'in the name'** of Christ, they will be in accord with all that Christ stands for and desires. When we pray, we're acknowledging that all the sap, nutrients, and energy we need comes from Him.

The **second** piece of evidence that we're remaining in Christ is seen when we **'demonstrate Christ-likeness in our lives'**. John 15:8 **"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."**

You see, it's not activity that glorifies God, but a Christ-like character. You may be bedridden, or suffering from some debilitating disease, but you can still manifest a Christ-like Spirit, what you are doing is demonstrating discipleship. That's all He asks of us, if we remain in Him, He will produce His character in us. And in this vital union there is much fruit bearing, we will **'keep on bearing'** much fruit.

The **third** piece of evidence that we're remaining in Christ is seen when we **'have a growing experience of Christ's love'**. John 15:9+10 **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."**

**What is our response to God's love?** There must always be a response if love is to grow. When love is responded to, it grows deeper and richer. But loved ones, if you're not feeling the depths of God's love, it's probably because you're not responding to it, you're not loving Him back. We have to feed any relationship to make it grow because as we all know relationships don't grow automatically.

Love has to be responded to and this is also true of our relationship with God. **1 John 4:19 "We love Him because He first loved us."** We need to keep on loving Him and that's our response to His love, love is the fruit of His life in us. Our love for Christ is the result of His sacrificial love for us.

Let me ask you, **are you growing deeper and deeper in God's love?** Because remaining in Christ is an intimate walk with Christ, where we're enriched by Christ. It's easy to obey Him when our hearts are moved by His love and when we obey Him our love grows deeper and deeper. We become something beautiful, the more you love Him, the more you want to remain in Him and the more you remain in Him, the more you will obey Him.

Notice what He says in **John 15:10+11 "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."** Jesus says if we remain in Him we receive, **'His love,'** and **'His joy.'**

**But what does He mean, when He says our 'joy will be complete'?** He means we will be filled with an inexpressible joy, the joy of a finished work. In other words, Jesus calls us into His joy, where we can experience Christ's permanent, absolute joy in our lives, it's the fruit of His life in us.

Just before we finish let me mention something really important here. You cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit if you're not attached to the Vine. You cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit if you don't have possess the Spirit. Jesus says in **John 15:26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me."**

When a person becomes a Christian by being baptised into Christ, it's at that moment, not before or after. But at that moment, when they are baptised, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **Acts 2:38 "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."**

In other words, we receive the Helper the moment we were saved and we become attached to the Vine. And it's then, that the Holy Spirit lives within us and begins the work of producing Christ-likeness in our lives. If you're not a Christian this morning, then let me encourage you to attach yourself to the Vine. Let me encourage you to be baptised, not only for the forgiveness of your sins but also so that the Holy Spirit can dwell in you and help you produce the fruit which God requires from every Christian.