

99. Abide in Christ

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I used to work at JC Penny's in El Con Mall in Tucson as a cashier for about a year after my family came to the United States from my home country Sweden 36 years ago. It was my first job in America. While I was working there, on occasions, I was sent to the Lawn and Garden Department to fill in, though I knew nothing about plants and nurseries. There was an elderly couple who used to come to the Lawn and Garden Department regularly and they always bought dying plants at \$1 or 50 cents per piece. One day my curiosity got the best of me and I asked one of the regular employees of that department why these people would buy those dying plants. He told me, "They are so good at taking care of plants that they revive almost all the plants they buy." Wow! This couple knew how to grow, how to prune, how to take care of the plants they got and the plants responded.

This elderly couple was pale in comparison with our Lord Jesus and Heavenly Father who takes care of us, prunes us, and makes us grow in His grace. To make that happen, we must do one thing all the time – Abide in Christ.

According to the last portion of chapter 14, Jesus told His disciples that it was the time to go from the Upper Room which was traditionally located southwest of Old Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane which was located at the foot of Mount Olive which was on the east side of Jerusalem. The distance is about a mile.

As they were heading out to the Garden of Gethsemane, they might have been passing by some vineyard areas or the temple which had two huge bronze doors that were made in Greece. On those doors, golden vines and grapes were embossed. Why vines? According to the OT, it depicts the nation of Israel. It was known to all the ancient Israelites that the nation of Israel was God's fruitful vineyard or vine. You can find them in Scripture – Psalm 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 19:10-14; and Hosea 10:1.

Being the Master Communicator that He is, Jesus was using either the embossed vine on the bronze doors of the temple or the vineyard that they were passing by, Jesus started to expound His truth to His disciples and us.

A. I AM THE TRUE VINE

John 15:1a "I am the true vine,

Please note what Jesus said here: *I am the true vine.* For Him to say "true vine", there must have been false vines. Yes, there are actually three different vines found in the Bible.

1) The Past Vine

Isaiah 5:1-7 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill. 2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes. 3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes? 5 And now, please let Me

tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 6 I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it." 7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.

The past vine was the nation of Israel which I mentioned a few minutes ago. In an act of wonderful grace, God transplanted Israel into Canaan and gave the nation every possible blessing a nation needed. But the vine, Israel produced wild grapes. Instead of practicing justice, oppression to its people; instead of producing righteousness, unrighteousness; instead of practicing the true worship of God, idol worship in the land.

2) The Future Vine

Revelation 14:18-20 And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." 19 So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

The future vine is the Gentile world system ripening for God's judgment in the future. But believers are branches in the "the vine of heaven." The unbelievers depend on this world for their sustenance and satisfaction, while believers of Jesus Christ depend on Him. The "vine of earth" will be cut down and destroyed when our Lord Jesus' returns – the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

3) The Present Vine

Of course, the Present Vine is our Lord Jesus.

By the way, this is the seventh and last of the "I AM" statements of Jesus Christ recorded in the Gospel of John.

B. MY FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER

John 15:1b-2 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, that it may bear more fruit.

If you have a KJV, it reads "husbandman" which means a farmer. What this verse says is our Father in heaven takes care of the vines. It is He who 'takes away' or 'prunes' branches so that they will produce more fruit.

Many born-again Christians pray that God will make them more fruitful in their lives, but they do not want to go through the pruning process that follows.

When we lived in the southwest part of Tucson over 10 years ago, we had a neighbor who knows a lot about planting and nursery. He was a Mr. Green Thumb himself. My idea of taking care of plants was watering the plants and giving Miracle Grow. I thought I was doing well. But he told me that I had to prune the rose bushes if I wanted to have more beautiful and quality roses.

It is the same thing with Father in Heaven, the Vinedresser who prunes the branches:
1) He cuts away dead branches that can breed disease and insects.
2) He even cuts away live portion of the branches so that the quality of the fruit will be bigger and better.

The worst judgment God the Father could bring to a believer would be to leave him alone, and have one's way. But our Heavenly Father prunes us, because He loves us. He encourages us to bear more fruit by cutting away dead things; the things that drag us down; the things distract us from following Him; and the things that can destroy our testimony of Jesus Christ.

Listen, our loving Heavenly Father is never nearer to us than when He is pruning us. None of us enjoy the pruning process, but we all know that we need it. How does He prune us? Through the Word of God:

John 15:3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

He simply uses the Word to convict and cleanse us:

*Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

On a side note, by reading v2, a person can start to cause a division within the church with a silly theology of "Eternal Security of Salvation" – whether you can lose it or not. As I've explained to you many times, please don't even consider arguing about that century old controversy that was used by satan to divide the church so effectively. Please note what Jesus Christ said to us here. He has never put His emphasis or main point on how far we can get away from Him and still have salvation, rather He teaches how to stay close with Him by "ABIDING IN HIM." Everybody gets that?

C. THE BRANCHES

John 15:4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Without the vine, of itself, a branch is weak and nothing. That is us. I know, I know. Some of you men are thinking, "I am not some silly old twig, but I am a stud." Oh yes, you are a stud, a dead 2 by 4 between two drywalls. Unless we are connected with Jesus Christ, we are dead spiritually, though we might be alive physically.

A dead branch is only good for load bearing like 2 by 4 or burning, but not for producing its own life. It must be connected with the vine.

Imagine if I planted a tree in my front yard, but after awhile, I decided it would look better in my backyard. Then after a few months, I realized it would be better in the front yard. So I dig it up and plant it again in the front yard. Not only will that tree fail to flourish, but it also will struggle to just survive.

Yet some people are like that with God. They decide to go to church, read their Bible, and pray regularly. They do this for a month, and then they uproot themselves and disappear for a few months. Then they come back to church again. Again, they

uproot themselves and go back to the old life. Though they come back and are at it again, but they never will grow spiritually that way because of their inconsistency.

This is the secret of spiritual growth: to abide in Jesus. Abide means to stay in a given place. For believers, it means to maintain an unbroken fellowship with God. It is consistency. And it results in producing lasting fruit.

In eleven verses we study here today, the same word keeps on popping up – “Abide” – 10 times. The Greek word of ‘abide’ is “meno” which means “to remain, to abide, to continue to be present.”

Folks, this abiding relationship with God is NOT automatic, rather we must cultivate it in our Christian life. It requires worship, meditation on God’s Word, the Bible daily, prayer, sacrifice, and service to others. But they are all joyful experiences. Once you have begun to cultivate this deeper abiding relationship with our Lord Jesus, you have no desire to go back to the shallow life that the world offers.

D. WITH ME OR WITHOUT ME

John 15:5-8 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

I want all of you to pay attention to the progression of the words in v2 to v5: No fruit, fruit, more fruit, and much fruit.

As we grow in holiness of God and obedience to His commands, we are bearing fruit of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that the branches do not eat the fruit – our words and our works, but others enjoy our fruit. In other words, with our spiritual fruit that grows out of our abiding life in Christ, we can bless other people around us.

Man-made works are dead and cannot reproduce anything spiritually good themselves, but Spirit-produced fruit will go on reproducing from one life to another. There will be fruit to more fruit, to much fruit.

If we are maintaining a living communion with God by abiding in Christ, and His words are at home with us, then our desires are going to change. Our prayers will not necessarily be the same as they were before. As we get in sync with the will of God, we’ll see that prayer is not getting God to do what we want Him to do, but that prayer is getting us to do what God wants us to do.

We will discover the important truth that prayer is not bending God our way, rather it is bending us His way. And then, we just may see our prayers being answered in the affirmative way every time we pray.

E. YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL

John 15:9-11 “As the Father loved Me, I also have 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 remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

When we don't abide in Christ, we do not have the fullness of joy He promises to those who abide in His love and obedience.

Let me tell you this. No one is more miserable than a disobedient, backslidden Christian. He cannot fully immerse himself into the carnal world because the Holy Spirit who lives in his heart convicts him every time he goes against the Lord. At the same time, he doesn't want to fully immerse himself into an abiding relationship in Christ because the other half of his heart longs for carnal things of the world.

You might be the miserable one here in this sanctuary. The Holy Spirit brought you here this morning. Other people in this room may not have noticed at all, but the Lord knows your misery. He wants you to return to Him, forsaking all the things of the world, but fully abide in Him from now on. He will fill your heart with joy that cannot be expressed, nor can it be measured.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) As branches in the Vine, we have the privilege of abiding in Christ and the responsibility of bearing fruit for His glory and serving others.**
- 2) Refusing to abide in Christ results in barrenness of a believer's miserable life.**