

XV. The Holy Spirit in Biblical Perspective

Led by the Spirit

“The Last Sermon from the Last Supper—The True Vine”

John 15:1–11

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June 5, 2016 – Morning sermon

We are looking at the last sermon by our Savior at the Last Supper from the Upper Room. John 15:1–17 says [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.*

[12] “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. [16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. [17] These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This text is an allegory and that means it is not a parable. In this study I will be doing something that the allegory demands that I do. If this was a parable I would be giving you one lesson because the parable is a one-legged animal so to speak. It is a like or as and is an extended simile which has one lesson but this is an allegory which means it is a collection of metaphors. That means it has multiple lessons in it. I am going to give you seven lessons from this with one simple takeaway that it calls for.

First, though I want to remind you that our focus is on being led by the Spirit. We have looked at the great text of Romans 8 and now we’re looking at a second great text. This is the last sermon that Jesus delivers from the Last Supper where He institutes the Lord’s Supper in the place known as the Upper Room. It begins in John 13 and ends in John 17. The main subject is that He is going to go away with a triumphant work and because of that, the same Spirit that was with Him from the womb out of the tomb to the throne, will be with us from our new birth all the way to glory. That Spirit of Christ is going to be at work within you and you will do greater works, not just with one nation but with all the nations, not just with one people but to all people and they will be reached for Christ because Christ abides in you. He has gone away to make a

home for you but He who has done that has sent the Helper who will make you His home until He comes for you to bring you to be with Him.

He has modeled for us the Spirit filled life as He grabbed the towel and basin and washed the feet of His disciples. He is now teaching us the Spirit filled life. He says He will pour forth His Spirit and at the end of John 14 He says 'let's arise and leave from here.' He hadn't gone anywhere so what was He talking about? He wasn't talking about leaving the Upper Room because He still has more of His sermon to preach. What He was using was a military term. The enemy is coming and in the power of the Spirit, 'let's arise' to meet him and that's what He will do at the cross. Now He is teaching us how we will be empowered and filled by that Spirit and all the blessings of that.

Now we get to His use of an illustration called an allegory of a vine and a vinedresser. For His disciples this illustration would not have been unfamiliar or unusual. Remember there was the Solomonic Temple that had been destroyed. Then there was the Zerubbabel Temple that had been rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity. Decades before Jesus was born Herod the Great began this refurbishing of the Zerubbabel Temple into something that many call the eighth wonder of the world. The gold that was upon it was not more than extravagant and this temple would not be finished until decades after His ascension in 64 AD. Then it will be destroyed in 70 AD. When it was destroyed Josephus the historian said the amount of gold that was taken down from it was so large and so pure that the price and value of gold plummeted fifty percent for the next ten years in the known world.

One of the most extravagant statements of gold was over the holy place, at the gate of the holies. There was this extraordinary vine with gigantic grapes and tendrils from the vine. Josephus says the grapes were so big they were the size of man and were solid gold. The vine was gold. This was something that kept being enhanced by the people of Israel continually because they saw the vine from the Old Testament. God as the Vinedresser was not new. It says in Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5 that God had taken a vine from Egypt and planted it in His land. O Israel, O Ephraim, O Judah I have planted you as a vine in My fertile soil but the outcry of your sin has been the fruit of that vine. So for these disciples who would be so amazed at these buildings would say to Jesus earlier in the week 'look how glorious they are' and Jesus will tell them that they are about to be torn down where not one stone would be left upon another, this thing that they marvel at. Why?

John has a big burden in the Gospel of John. It is to explain that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Temple. It started all the way back in John 1:14 which says *[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* The word dwelt was a noun that was made into a verb. It could be translated, the Word became flesh and temped or tabernacled among us. In other words, one of the burdens of John in his Gospel is to tell us that those temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel are a shadow and type that is pointing to Christ. He is the true Temple. That is why Jesus will cleanse the temple and say 'this belongs to My Father and I am the Temple that will be torn down and rebuilt in three days' speaking of His death, burial and resurrection. The Shekinah glory of God is dwelling within Him and that temple was the shadow temple but He is the true Temple.

Now they are about to learn something else. Israel, was the unworthy shadow vine. I am the True Vine. There are seven 'I Am' statements in the Gospel of John speaking of Jesus. I am the Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life, I am the Bread, I am the Water etc. All of these 'I Am' statements come to a final I Am in John 15, I am the True Vine. God the Father is the

Vinedresser. You think this temple is something but I'm greater. This vine that you are looking at as you see yourself in all that extravagance is just a shadow. That did not bring praise of fruit to God. I am the True Vine and I will bring the true branches and the true fruit. I want to now walk you through this allegory to see a number of things from it because here is the Spirit-filled life portrayed for us, the Vine.

There are five elements to this allegory. Element number one is the True Vine. Element number two is the Vinedresser or the Gardner or the Owner. Element three are the branches. The fourth element is the pruning. The fifth element is the fruit. Now we'll take a closer look at each of these elements starting with the first one.

Who is the True Vine? Jesus is the True Vine. I am the True Vine. Israel was a shadow. Israel could not be the Vine because as the Vinedresser planted you there was no good fruit that came from you. The True Vine will bring forth the good fruit through the true branches.

Secondly, God the Father is the Vinedresser, the Gardner. This can be seen in Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80 and now this comes to fruition. It is just like the temple has come to fulfillment in the True Temple and now we see Vine coming to the True Vine.

Thirdly, there are the branches and there are two types of branches. There are the true branches that are abiding in the Vine and there are the false branches associated with but not abiding in the Vine. The true branches bear fruit. The false branches are fruitless for they bear no fruit.

Fourthly, there is the activity of pruning but dare I say the prunings. There are two types of pruning. There is the cast away pruning and then there is the cut back pruning. The cast away pruning is when the Father prunes the false/fruitless branches out and then they wither. Then they are gathered and thrown into the fire. Then there is the cut back pruning where it is cut back not for it to wither but for it to grow fruit and more fruit and then much fruit. Those in the Vine bear fruit and then the Father prunes them and they bear more fruit. Then they bear much fruit. There is this increasing fruit bearing by the true branches because the Father is pruning those who are abiding in the Vine and the Vine is abiding in them.

We have this wonderful young man who helps us with our yard and he is very gifted at what he does. He has some people working for him that I think are even more gifted than he is I think. One day I came home and told my wife we had to do something with crape myrtles so we talked with our yard man. He told us he would cut them back and so I came home the day he cut them back and told my wife 'I think we've committed crape murder. Have you seen how far they were cut back?' Our yard man assured me he had cut the right branches at the right time, nothing had been wasted and that we'd see the benefits. Three months later we see this gorgeous crape myrtle tree in our yard and then I realized the one that knows what they are doing doesn't waste the branches when they cut them back but they are preparing them to bear a greater beauty, produce and product.

Fifthly, is the fruit and we don't have to guess what the fruit is. The text tells us. John 15:8 says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* So we see that fruit bearing is a lifestyle that is devoted to two things – the glory of God and revealing to the world that we have a discipling relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a lifestyle that points to the glory of God. Before we were converted the Spirit of God came and took us from death unto life and then abides within us yet before we were falling short of the glory of God. Now we want everything to glorify God so that people will see Jesus in every thought, word and attitude in us.

The lifestyle not only gives glory to God but the lifestyle shows and reveals so that you may prove to be His disciples. It manifests to the world that Christ is our Lord and Savior. We are not perfect for if we were perfect we would already be at much fruit but we go from fruit, to more fruit to much fruit. He is maturing our fruit bearing. Our desire is to making increasingly clearer to everyone that the world is not our Lord neither is the powers and things of this world and they are not our Savior or Deliverer. It is Christ alone. Now I want to walk you through the seven lessons from this allegory and the first is the foundational one so we need to get this one right.

Lesson one is the fruitful, true branches are those who have a true relationship with Jesus Christ. The true branches are those who have a vital relationship with the Vine. The Vine is in them and they are in the Vine. These are the people who have been converted by the power of God through the power of the Spirit of God who dwells within them and as the Spirit dwells within them then they desire to dwell in the presence of Christ. They have a personal, intentional and reciprocal relationship with Christ. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. The Bible calls this relationship abiding for He is abiding in you and now you are abiding in Him. The power of the Spirit compels you to seek Him. You want to abide in Him.

My dear grandmother had to be one of the greatest saints of the world. I knew when she was upset she would make this sound of 'phtut.' When she made that sound I knew I was in trouble. She never seemed to say anything negative or critical but the closest she would come to that is when she would say 'son, I just can't abide with that.' From the word abide we get the word abode from which is where we live. Abide is what we do in the abode.

One of my professors showed me that a number of Greek words are translated with prepositions – in, with, of, by – but there are two different prepositions that are very similar in their intent. One is rightly translated with the word 'in' and the other one is translated 'into.' We use the word 'into' when we are immersed into something, not just in it or about but into it. Wherever you find the word 'into' it is never used with a person as the object except in John 15. This is the only place you'll find this word used with a person as the object and it's used concerning our relationship with Christ. I don't just know about Jesus or just in Jesus but I am to be into Jesus, abiding in Christ. It would be wonderful if everyone who saw us said 'that so and so is sure into Jesus.' For many of us people see us into football or this or that. True branches want to be into Jesus and it becomes obvious that they are into Jesus.

They are abiding in Him. They are vitally remaining in Him. They are embracing Him. In John 1 they asked Jesus where He was abiding because they wanted to come and abide with Him. They said 'where are You?' He is living in you and we want to remain, abide and live in Him. That is the key to the fruitful branches for the true branches are into Christ. When their allegiance is to Him and Him alone that is when they bear fruit. That is when the sap rises into the branch and brings forth fruit, more fruit and much fruit. Now there is a flip side.

The second lesson is the fruitless branches are those who have a superficial relationship with Him. You may see them in the arbor where you find the Vine but they are not remaining in the Vine. How do you know they are not remaining? There is no fruit. They are fruitless and that tells you they are not into the Vine. They may have an organizational relationship with Christ but they are not self-denying and Christ absorbed but they are self-absorbed and perhaps use Christ for their self-absorption. They may have a curious relationship with Him but they don't have a real, intentional, abiding, personal, pursuing, reciprocal relationship with Christ.

The third lesson from the allegory is that fruit bearing has two definitive, observable passions. Those who are abiding with bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit. The first passion is

for God's glory. Those abiding in Christ love to gather for the worship of God for Jesus says when My people worship I'm in their midst. Jesus inhabits the praises of His people and they want to be where He is. They want to glorify and exalt Him. Then they want the world to know that Christ is their Lord and Savior. No one can say 'Christ is Lord' without the Spirit. John 15:8 says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* You want to glorify God in every sphere of life, not just in gathered worship but in every sphere of your life – work, neighborhood, relationships, etc. I won't be obnoxious about it but I want people to know Christ is top of my life, into my life and I am into Christ for He is my life. I want it to be clear. I want my life to be living proof that I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I am not a secret agent or undercover agent. I want the world to know I am His and He is mine. Those two observable passions are seen in the true branches as they bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit.

The fourth lesson is fruitless branches don't simply face a meaningless life and a loss of rewards in heaven, but fruitless branches face a withering life and the judgment of God for all eternity. Fruit is certainly attached to the rewards in the dynamic of heaven but fruitlessness says there is a rootlessness for you are not abiding in the Vine. So what has happened? The Father takes it away and it withers in this life. You may still hang around church but there will always be people to blame, criticisms to be made and a withering life of endless despair of self-absorption instead of Christ-absorption. In the withering life comes the end of life, the gather up and then the casting into the fire of God's eternal judgment in a place called hell.

Praise God you are reading this but Briarwood can't save you. You have to be in the Vine. Come to Christ and instead of fruitlessness chose fruit. Instead of despair and emptiness there is the joy of Christ and the glory of God. There is the joy of making His honor seen in your life. There is the joy of being His witness and seeing other people come to Christ. Please come to Him.

The fifth lesson is the Vine is not dependent on the branches or the fruit nor is the Vine enhanced by the branches or the fruit. The branches that bear fruit are dependent upon the Vine, remain in the Vine and draw upon the Vine. Sometimes we don't teach about fruit bearing because we're afraid people might think we're teaching legalistic salvation where you have to bear fruit to be saved. No, we are saying that saved people bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit but it is not their fruit that saves them. It is the Vine that saves them.

There are three ways He made this clear to us in the text that the Vine saves us. One, is when He said we are already clean because of the Word He has spoken. Christ makes us clean, not our fruit bearing. Your fruit bearing is evidence of your salvation, not the foundation of your salvation. The second thing is that He is abiding in us and the reason we can abide in Him is because He has already come to abide in us. His abiding in us is not dependent upon us abiding in Him for our abiding in Him is the evidence that He is abiding in us. The Spirit of God came to us and it is that Spirit that propels us toward Him because He sent Him to us. Thirdly, is that He chose me and I did not choose Him. People in theology will talk about this until I come back. He appointed us to go and bear fruit. It started with Christ, not me. He is not dependent on me but I am dependent on Him. He called you before you ever existed. I chose you and that is why you chose Me. When you abide in Me your fruit is evidence of that.

The sixth lesson is the true branches not only enjoy the benefits of the Vine but they extend the benefits and blessings of the Vine to others and to the world. Look at that fruit that brings common grace and redeeming grace to the whole world. Look at what is happening through the branches that are bearing fruit that is coming from the Vine. Did you see all the

blessings? You are clean, empowered, you worship, you're abiding, and you are loving His commandments because you love Him. You love Me the way I love the Father. His joy is in you and your joy is made full. Boy what benefits!

There is a big discussion there when His joy is in you and your joy is made complete. Is His joy in you or does He take joy in you? Yes! This Jesus whom you are abiding in and that abides in you, takes joy in you. He has joy in you and you are bearing fruit to His glory. He is the One who gave you the ability but He takes joy in you and in you there is the joy of the Lord that fills you. The fact that He takes joy in me is hard for me to imagine. I just want my wife to put up with not to have joy in me and Jesus takes joy in me! Then His joy fills my soul when I abide in Him. You enjoy those benefits and then the fruit goes into the world. Then you extend those benefits and blessings to others.

The seventh lesson is fruit bearing is increased by two intentional acts. Act number one is that you are abiding in Him (draw near to Him, get in His Word) and as you abide in Him your fruit increases. Another benefit is in John 15:7 which says *[7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* That is not a blank check but a cashier's check. This is not for you to just go and ask for whatever you want and you'll get it. You missed the 'if' for if you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish... You get prayer power when you abide in Him and that's a benefit. The only way you abide in Him is by the Spirit and the Word and then whatever you ask He will grant because your wisher has been changed. Your asker has been redefined. Your wanter has been transformed. Now you want, wish and ask for something totally different because His Word is in you and you are in Him and it's not the toys of dust that fill your soul but it's the glory of God and the evidence of Christ that fills your soul. Then when you call upon Him watch Him answer those prayers. Watch what happens when His Word is framing your prayers as you abide in Him.

As you are abiding in Him, that actually increases your fruit. If you think God is doing something in your life now you ought to praise Him and wait till you see what will happen for the best is yet to come. Another intentional act is that you bear fruit when He starts pruning. He starts cutting back. We think the branches are wasted when He does that but that is what the world thinks when they see us go through sickness, loss or whatever difficulty it may be. I just recently got back from South Africa and while I was there I got a stomach virus and the last two talks I gave I had to sit down to give them. Some came up to me afterward and said it was better when I was sitting than when I was standing. It is amazing when God brings us down and weak to humble us, how the fruit starts flowing. He is pruning and those aren't wasted branches. The world says 'I can't believe that is happening' but we look at it and say *[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* (James 1:2-4). God is not casting me away but He is cutting me back that I will bear more fruit.

About 12 years ago a dear brother in Christ met me in the sanctuary of the church and said "Why did you do that?!" I could tell he was agitated. I said "What did I do?" He said "Look at those Magnolia trees." The caretaker of our church had pruned them way back. He said "Why did you do that?" I said "I didn't do that. It was the caretaker that you gave me. I didn't even know it had happened until you told me." He said "All those beautiful branches have been cut away and all." I felt bad and went to check why it was done. The caretaker assured me we would like the product. About six months later they were so beautiful. Praise the Lord this man who called me down came to call me up and said "Hey I'm sorry for it does look better."

When we are going through these times of pruning, there is some fruit bearing coming but He is cutting back and not cutting down to bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit. So here is your takeaway.

The takeaway is to grow upward, to move forward, to live outward (for Christ), you must intentionally and dependently move downward and grow inward toward Christ. To grow upward is to worship, to live outward is to witness, to move forward with hope and love for Christ you must intentionally move downward and inward, humbling yourself toward Christ. Abide. When I was thinking about pruning I wonder if His disciples later after thinking through this realized in that Upper Room the Vinedresser was pruning. Judas had been taken away just minutes before and he went, withered and faced eternal judgment. The Vine from one who was superficially related was pruned and he was cast away. The Lord was doing more pruning in that Upper Room for the disciples were going to become fearful. He was going to expose their weaknesses. Peter would deny Him three times. He is going to prune His disciples but He is not casting them away for He is cutting them back. When He is raised from the dead they will now go and thousands will come to Christ. They will bear fruit. The disciples are being pruned from self-confidence to Christ abiding.

He didn't just do pruning in the Upper Room. He did more pruning. It is the Vine Himself. See Jesus being pruned by the Father to bear fruit. The Son of Man learned obedience in His suffering and will bear much fruit because the Son of Man will go to the cross. The Father will prune the Son of Man and He will be cast away into hell on the cross in our place so that we can be joined to the Vine. He will bear the judgment of God as a cast away. My God, My God why has Thou forsaken Me. The result is you – much fruit to the glory of the Father. We are His disciples whom He abides in and who love to abide in Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments in Your Word and for this marvelous, wonderful text of Scripture. Would You please speak to our hearts? Let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Bring men and women to the Vine, Father. Prune us and call us to abide in the Vine that we will bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit to Your glory and the world will see and hear the followers of Christ and be drawn to the Vine as the blessings of the fruit are carried to the world, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE ALLEGORY

THE ALLEGORY EXPLAINED

LIFE TAKEAWAY

To grow upward, to move forward, to live outward, you must intentionally and dependently move downward and grow inward toward Christ.