

Our 40 Day Journey to the Cross
April 7 - April 12

Day 31 Wednesday

John 15:1-17 NKJV The True Vine

- 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 bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
- 3** You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
- 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.
- 5** “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.
- 9** “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.

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I 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 remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

I Am the True Vine

This was a familiar symbol. God repeatedly used a vine as a symbol of His people in the Hebrew Scriptures (one example is Psalm 80:8-9). Just in the previous week Jesus publicly taught about Israel being like a vineyard in the Parable of the Vineyard.

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers

Matthew 21:33-44

33 “Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.

35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another.

36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them.

37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’

39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”

41 They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”

42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’?

43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

Jesus spoke this to His disciples, probably as they stood in the upper room and prepared to leave. He used the picture of the vine because there were grapevines everywhere in ancient Israel. Also, there was a large golden vine set as a prominent decoration on the front of the temple communicating the idea that Israel was God’s vine. As well, “The vine was a recognized symbol also of the Messiah.

Of the many pictures of the relationship between God and His people, the vine and branch picture emphasizes complete dependence and the need for constant connection. The branch depends on the vine even more than the sheep depends on the shepherd or the child depends on the father.

As Jesus was about to depart from His disciples, this was important encouragement. He would remain united to them and they to Him as truly as branches are connected to the main vine.

Every Branch in Me That Does Not Bear Fruit He Takes Away

The branches that are taken away were never properly abiding in the vine, demonstrated by the fact that they did not bear fruit. There is an alternative understanding of this passage that bears some consideration.

James Montgomery Boice (among others) believes that the ancient Greek verb *airo*, translated, takes away is more accurately translated lifts up. The idea is that the Father lifts up unproductive vines off of the ground (as was common in the ancient practices of vineyard care). Those caring for ancient grape vines made sure to lift them up off the ground that they might get more sun and bear fruit better. The verb translated 'cut off' (*aireo*) means literally 'to lift up' or 'to take away'; the second, 'trims clean' (*kathaireo*), a compound of the first, means 'to cleanse' or 'to purify.'

Every Branch That Bears Fruit He Prunes

This word for prunes is the same word translated cleanse in other places. The same word could apply to either "pruning" or "cleansing" in ancient Greek. The vinedresser cleans up the fruit-bearing vine so it will bear more fruit.

Left to itself a vine will produce a good deal of unproductive growth. For maximum fruitfulness extensive pruning is essential. Dead wood is worse than fruitlessness, for dead wood can harbor disease and decay...God removes the dead wood from his church and disciplines the life of the believer so that it is directed into fruitful activity.

Vines and Branches

In this verse, there is a clear sense of expected growth. First mentioned is barrenness, then productivity, then abundance. In terms of our spiritual lives, this is how God expects us to progress. As part of that process, God removes and prunes the branches. While the analogy of the vine and branches is deep and important, it is like any other analogy in that it should not be taken out of context. When Jesus refers to a "branch in me," in this instance, the context does not imply those who are "saved." Rather, focus is entirely on the analogy of a vine and branches. Some branches appear to be connected to the main body, but are not—those branches are dead and will never produce fruit. The vinedresser removes those branches, to allow room and resources for the living branches to accomplish their purpose. This relates to upcoming comments where Jesus refers to those who "abide" in Him (John 15:6).

Around or Attached?

In both the vine, and in our relationship to God, merely being "around" or "attached" to the concept of Christ is not enough. It is possible for a person to claim the name of Christ, and to associate with believers, and yet not have a life-giving connection to the "true vine" which is Jesus. Like a branch "in the vine" which produces no fruit, these are people who have attached themselves to the church, but are not connected to the Source of life. The One with ultimate knowledge and authority—God as the "vinedresser"—will eventually remove those false branches and discard them.

"I No Longer Call You Servants, Instead, I Have Called You Friends"

The reference to believers as "friends" is important. Abraham, called a "friend of God" (James 2:23), is an Old Testament example of how God's communication indicates a form of friendship in addition to obedience (Genesis 18:17).

Here, Jesus calls the disciples—His "friends," as proven by communication. God openly spoke with Abraham (Genesis 18:17), and Jesus openly speaks with us through His Word (John 15:7). That Christ instructs and informs us, beyond brute commands, as well as offering His life for our sake (John 15:13) are powerful proofs that He sees us as His "friends."

This does not erase the idea that believers are "servants" of Christ (Romans 1:1). Jesus has used and will continue to use such terminology in reference to His followers. Rather, Jesus is indicating that His intended relationship with believers involves communication and support, rather than simple dictatorship.

Connected Through Christ

This also supports the "vine and branches" analogy Jesus used earlier in this passage (John 15:1–8). As God's love and knowledge flow to Christ, Christ passes them down to us, as a vine passes life along to branches. We, in turn, are meant to pass the Word, and love, to other people (Matthew 28:19; John 13:34–35; 14:15).