

John 15:1-17

As we closed our Bibles on last week's lesson, we heard the door to the upper room open, and Jesus' voice summoning His disciples --- **"Arise, let us go hence."**

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During the evening, Jesus had given them a new commandment --- **"That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."**

He had assured them of a place in heaven, and told them about His second coming. He had also reminded them of His deity. It was a central truth, and one that Philip, and probably the rest of the disciples, had trouble grasping --- **"Have I been**

**so long time with you, and yet hast
thou not known me, Philip?"**

Then He introduced them to a new privilege
in prayer.

During those 3-1/2 years, they had been able
to bring their petitions directly to
Jesus. This would no longer be
possible.

But in essence, nothing was going to change.

John 14:13-14 **"And whatsoever ye shall ask
in my name, that will I do, that the
Father may be glorified in the Son.
14: If ye shall ask any thing in my
name, I will do it."**

And then Jesus told them about the coming of
the Holy Spirit.

One of the plusses would be bound up in the
mystery of the Trinity --- **"I will not**

leave you comfortless: I will come to you."

And, finally, He had given them His gift of peace ---- **"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."**

And now it was time to close the door behind them, and head off into the night.

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I'm sure the disciples didn't realize it, but Jesus was operating on a precise schedule.

He had sent Judas away some time ago.

Now He must take His next step in God's plan --- **"as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."**

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On the way to the Garden of Gethsemane,
Jesus continued to prepare His
disciples for the days ahead.

And knowing Jesus' ability to turn His
surroundings into object lessons, we
wouldn't be surprised if they were
passing a vineyard when He said --- "**I
am the true vine, and my Father is the
husbandman.**"

Certainly, vineyards are a common sight in
Israel, but that night they took on a
special significance.

Yes, a vineyard would be very helpful in
focussing His disciples' attention on the
lesson, but I don't think that vineyard
was responsible for prompting the lesson.

First of all, you will notice that in Jesus'
illustration in John 15:1, He called
Himself "**the true vine.**"

That meant there must have been *another* vine, and one that was false.

And, although it's not recorded in the book of John, Jesus had been talking about a vineyard on the previous day.

The reference is found in Matthew 21:33-39. Jesus had been talking to the chief priests and the elders of the people, and as usual, they had become argumentative.

After a brief discussion in which they challenged His authority, Jesus told them a parable about a vineyard.

Matthew 21:33-39 "--- **There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:**

34: And when the time of the fruit drew

near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

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

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

37: But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38: But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39: And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him."

No doubt you have already clued in to the fact that Israel was the vineyard, and their religious leaders were the husbandmen.

The servants were God's prophets, and, of course, the son was Jesus Himself.

Jesus ended the parable by saying, **"The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."**

Yes, Israel would be temporarily set aside, and God would be dealing with a new vine.

I'm quite sure this transition was on Jesus' mind, as He headed for the Garden of Gethsemane.

And as they passed a vineyard, He began to explain this new situation to His disciples.

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John 15:1-2 "I am the true vine, and my
Father is the husbandman.

2: Every branch in me that beareth not
fruit he taketh away: and every branch
that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that
it may bring forth more fruit."

Although the branches had not been
identified as yet, it is quite obvious
there were two groups.

First of all, there were the branches that
produced no fruit.

And then there was a second group that
produced some fruit.

We will be looking at both of these groups
in a minute, but first of all, let's
consider the subject of vine dressing,
or pruning.

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Actually, pruning is the oldest occupation
in the world.

Genesis 2:15 **"And the LORD God took the man,
and put him into the garden of Eden to
dress it and to keep it."**

We have to ask the question, *Why would
perfect trees in a perfect garden need to
be pruned? Wouldn't they be designed to
produce fruit without the need of
modifications?*

Well, sort of, but not quite.

If Adam wanted a good supply of fruit, he
must bend their wills into alignment
with his.

Left to themselves, they would put most of
their energy into bigger branches, more
leaves, and getting taller.

In short, they would concentrate on becoming
beautiful trees.

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And the principle is still the same today.

Take apple trees, for instance.

In the spring of the year, before the leaves
are on, you can really see the shape of
the branches.

One year, my wife, Eleanor, and I, were
driving past an apple orchard that had
been well pruned.

The trees were very short, and all their
branches curved downward.

From the standpoint of beauty, you would
have called them mis-shapen.

But Eleanor looked at those poor mis-shapen
trees and exclaimed, *Aren't they
beautiful?*

Now, beyond a shadow of doubt, that proves
my wife had grown up on a farm.

But, yes, from the standpoint of fruit-bearing, they were beautiful trees. They weren't impressive to look at, but they were wonderful fruit producers. But they weren't natural fruit producers. No, their nature had been bent to the will of the farmer.

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Getting back to that evening when Jesus and His disciples were passing a vineyard. Turning to His little company, He said, in V 1-2, **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.**

2: Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

And as you might expect, God is a very diligent vine dresser.

He doesn't let things just happen. He does what is necessary to produce fruit.

And as we have already noticed, Jesus, in calling Himself "**the true vine**," was comparing Himself to Israel.

By this time, Israel had been temporarily set aside because they had refused to render the expected fruit.

And not only was this true of the nation, but it was also true of most of the citizens.

It was both a national and an individual problem.

We will be approaching the subject of "**the true vine**" on a similar basis.

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I'm sure V 2 has prompted some individuals in their belief that Christians can lose their salvation.

And when we get to V 6, we will see a similar problem.

However, concerning V 2, if Jesus had intended His words to teach a saved-and-lost Gospel, I don't think He would have chosen His 11 disciples to represent the branches.

These men were to form the nucleus of His church, and would hardly be appropriate to represent the lost.

So let's take a closer look at V 2 ---

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

First we must consider the branches that have produced absolutely no fruit.

That is --- **"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."**

No, there was no evidence of the fruits of the Spirit in their lives because the Holy Spirit wasn't *in their* lives.

Love, joy, peace, and longsuffering were missing because He was missing.

Neither was there any works of the Holy Spirit found in their lives.

So I think it is quite obvious that these branches represented the tares.

They only appeared to be believers, but, in actual fact, they were not.

They looked like part of the Vine, but they were not actually connected.

As a result, they were unable to produce the fruit of the Vine.

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Even among the disciples, there was an example of this kind of individual.

Judas was a separate branch.

At no time in Jesus' public ministry had there been any real attachment to the Vine.

Oh, He was attached to the cause, but not to Christ.

When the kingdom collapsed, or so we thought, he *sold out* the Vine for 30 pieces of silver.

Skipping down to V 6, we find Jesus' words -
-- **"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."**

Unlike many trees, grape branches are completely useless if they are severed from the vine.

They can't be used to make furniture, or build houses.

You can't even make a peg to hang your hat
on!

No, they are fit for nothing, and must be
cast into the fire and burned.

No doubt as the disciples listen to their
Master, they would be smelling the
smoke from the heaps of burning
branches in the Kidron Valley.

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And a local church, as a body, can also lose
its usefulness, even though it may
contain true believers.

The church at Ephesus was a prime example of
this.

Oh, they were active, doing the right
things, saying the right things, but
were in peril of being cut off.

We can read about them in --- Revelation

2:4-5 **"Nevertheless I have somewhat**

against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5: Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

No, the Lord has no use for a local church that doesn't love Him.

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And now, we must consider the second part of V 2 --- **"and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."**

Here, of course, Jesus is referring to believers, and they are producing fruit.

So, everything will be rosy, right?

Well, no, that's not necessarily true.

We better look at V 2 a little more closely

**"-- and every branch that beareth
fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring
forth more fruit."**

No, simply bearing some fruit is not good
enough.

However, left to itself, that's exactly what
a branch will do.

It will produce a little fruit, but it will
also produce a lot of suckers.

That reveals its natural tendency to bush
out and improve its image.

Yes, it will concentrate on looking like a
prosperous grape branch, but, in
reality, it will produce very little
fruit.

Farmers have called these irritating little
shoots --- suckers.

They have inherited that rather
uncomplimentary name because of their
tendency to suck the strength out of
the vine while producing no fruit.

Obviously the branch thinks these suckers
are worth the effort, but the vine
dresser has a decidedly different
opinion.

So God, the Divine Vine Dresser, takes out
His pruning knife and, **Snip!** They're
history!

He's looking for "**more fruit.**"

And why shouldn't He?

After all, we are a genuine grape branch,
aren't we?

It's His right to expect "**more fruit.**"

Why should He let His Son's resources be
wasted on suckers?

Oh, they might be our heart's desire, but
will they bring glory to God?

**"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear
much fruit,"** not suckers.

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And then Jesus changes the subject, although
it is closely related to His vine
teaching.

V 3 **"Now ye are clean through the word which
I have spoken unto you."**

The cleansing power of the Word of Christ
can keep a Christian on track, and
often avoid the painful necessity of
pruning.

Yes, hearing, believing, and obeying the
Word of Christ can often make further
intervention unnecessary.

Also in the local church, the Word is an
effective defence against apostasy.

And there is another benefit.

A church that holds tightly to principles,
precepts, and practices of the Word of
God will usually be quite unappealing
to the make-believe Christian.

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Up until this point, productivity has been
the responsibility of the Vine and the
Vine Dresser.

Now Jesus identifies His disciples, and,
indeed, the Church of Jesus Christ, as
the branches.

And along with that, He points out their
responsibility to abide.

If you look closely, you will discover that
Jesus doesn't require fruit production
from the branches.

As the old hymn tells us, we are simply

♪♪ Channels of Blessing!

No, a branch isn't an end in itself. It is a channel.

Its job isn't to produce fruit. It only bears the fruit that the Vine produces. Its only responsibility is to abide in the place God has already put it, drinking in the strength of the vine.

So, the bottom line is, abide and abound.

V 4-5 **"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.**

5: I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

Yes, --- **"without me ye can do nothing."**

That makes *abiding* very important, doesn't it?

We cannot bear fruit by ourselves, and we cannot help but bear fruit *in Christ*.

It just happens. **"He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."**

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And now we come to V 6 once again.

By its proximity to verses 4-5, you would naturally assume it applied to the believer, and no doubt that is one of the reasons why some Christians are convinced they can lose their salvation.

V 6 **"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."**

Pretty sobering, isn't it?

However, if V 6 actually implied that a Christian could lose his salvation, it would stand in complete opposition to many other portions of scripture, like Romans 8:28-39, for instance.

We won't have time to read this entire portion in Romans, but let me give you the bottom line.

Romans 8:38-39 **"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39: Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

No, the believer can never be separated from Christ.

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And even if we neglect to compare scripture with scripture, V 6 can stand alone. That's because Jesus was very careful in His choice of pronouns.

Let me explain.

In John 15:4-5, when Jesus emphasized the importance of abiding, He used what is known in grammar as second person pronouns to refer to the branches.

--- **"I in you."**

--- **"except ye abide in me."**

--- **"and I in him".**

Yes, you, ye, and him all refer to people who are personally connected to the speaker, and, in this case, that would be His disciples.

However, in V,6, Jesus switches to third person pronouns.

--- **"men gather them."**

--- **"they are burned."**

The pronouns them and they refer to a group of people who are not personally connected to the speaker.

In short, V 6 refers to the tares, the false believers who only appear to be abiding in the Vine --- **and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."**

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However, believers who do not draw their strength from the Vine, will be of no more value to the Lord than the unbelievers we have just talked about.

As Jesus said concerning believers who have no fellowship with Him --- **"without me ye can do nothing."**

And I don't think you will find a more
withered up branch than a Christian who
is not abiding in Christ.

There's no love, joy, peace, longsuffering,
gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,
or temperance.

No, there are none of the fruits of the
Spirit in his life.

And there is no fruit for Christ either.

Nothing that would attract anyone to the
Saviour, and a great deal that would
drive them away.

Oh, he'll get to heaven all right, but with
little more than the shirt on his back!

Yes, **"the fire shall try every man's work of
what sort it is,"** and his wood, hay and
stubble will be completely consumed.

He **"shall suffer loss: but he himself shall
be saved; yet so as by fire."**

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And then Jesus turns His attention to the abiding Christian.

V 7-8 **"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.**

8: Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

Wouldn't it be natural for a branch to abide in the Vine that God has placed him in? Well, unfortunately, we still have an old nature.

So, in spite of the obvious benefits, we must determine in ourselves to abide in the Vine.

So what does that entail?

Well, Jesus touched upon several ways to abide during that evening in the upper room.

Using the example of foot washing, He stressed the importance of daily cleansing for fellowship --- **"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."**

He also talked about our love for Him ---

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."

And speaking of commandments, He gave His disciples a new one that very evening -- **"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another."**

And as they walked to the garden, Jesus continued to remind them about these very things.

V 9-10 **"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.
10: If ye keep my commandments, ye**

shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

Yes, love produces obedience.

In fact, it was that very principle that was propelling Jesus' feet along the path to Gethsemane.

As He walked, He talked.

V 11 **"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."**

Joy is manufactured in heaven.

It's not like happiness, which depends to a large degree on what's happening.

For instance, there wasn't any real joy in the immediate circumstances that Jesus was facing.

In fact, He would soon be agonizing over the spiritual implications of the cross.

But there was joy in His *heart*.

Hebrews 12:2 "---**who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.**"

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V 12 **"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."**

Yes, He was reminding them once again of their responsibility to love one another, but this time He would tell them about the operation of love in His own life.

V 13-14 **"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

14: Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

15: Henceforth I call you not servants;

for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

That's the difference between a servant and a friend, isn't it?

A servant simply does what he's told, but a friend is taken into your confidence.

That evening, Jesus elevated His disciples from the status of servants to *friends*.

And already He had taken them into His confidence.

It wasn't the disciples' idea. Jesus had taken the initiative.

V 16 **"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that**

**whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father
in my name, he may give it you."**

Like the disciples, He has chosen us to be
His friends.

And not only has He died for us, and chosen
us to be His friends, but He has also
ordained us.

In the Church of Jesus Christ, certain men
are ordained to carry on the work of
God.

It's a high and holy calling.

But Jesus has also ordained (or set apart)
every believer for a specific purpose.

And what is that specific purpose?

It's that we "**should go and bring forth
fruit.**"

And He has also decreed --- "**that your fruit
should remain.**"

Yes, our work for Jesus Christ will not
become obsolete and fade away.

And there will be rewards for that work.

And did you notice? He called it -- **"your
fruit."**

Isn't that amazing?

Jesus is the Vine.

He holds us up.

He gives us the strength to produce fruit.

He has made us grape branches in the first
place, making it only natural to bear
grapes.

And then His Father has carefully removed
any useless things in our lives, so we
will bear **"more fruit."**

But when the fruit finally arrives, He
doesn't call it His fruit. He calls it
"your fruit."

God is so good, isn't He?

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In the last part of V 16, Jesus says ---

**"that whatsoever ye shall ask of the
Father in my name, he may give it you."**

Again, that was a reminder concerning their
new privilege in prayer.

It was to be the exclusive possession of the
disciple who was abiding in Christ, and
the end in view would always be, **"that
the Father may be glorified in the
Son."**

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In this week's lesson, we have been thinking
about love and friendship.

Unfortunately, in next week's lesson, we
will have to face the subject of hate.

Yes, friendship has its privileges, but it
also has its cost --- **"I have chosen you**

**out of the world, therefore the world
hateth you."**

Next week then --- the other side of the
coin.