

The Ultimate Vine
Abiding in Christ (Dr. James Rosscup. 2005)
John 15:1
Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23

Bethany Baptist Church
May 21, 2017 (p.m. service)

Let's begin w/ a very short & simple *word association exercise*...

I'll say a *word* & you say another word it brings to mind...(ready?)... **“true!”**

Did anyone say **“false”**? Did anyone say **“real”**?

Turn w/ me and let's read Jesus' *“Vine & Branches”* allegory from **John 15:1-11**

Again, this is an *allegory*, which means its images are familiar and they are given to *teach a lesson*.

Tonight we want to briefly *review* the main points of the text, then focus on the *very beginning* of Jesus' illustration:

The vine & the branches & NT believers

1. What *was* Jesus' *main point*, the *big idea* in this illustration?
2. We'll soon see that Jesus' main truths concerned *union, communion & fruitfulness*.
 - a. **Union**. The union between Christ and His people because they are *with Him* and *in Him* (Eph 2!) This *union* is simply true; it is a *theological, positional* reality for each true believer. It is the *union* that sees us as *crucified & raised & seated & living w/* our Lord.
 - b. **Communion**. *Communion* is our *experience* of the theological truth of *union*.
 - c. **Fruitfulness**. Bearing *fruit* is a big deal in John 15! Being Jesus' *branch* means bearing Jesus' *fruit*!

3. You might also say Jesus' word picture is a *story w/characters*:
 - a. **Jesus** (*vine – source of the godly life; power to bear righteous fruit*).
 - i. We've come to the final example in the *Gospel of John* of Jesus' **seven "I Am"** declarations: *I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the door of the sheep, I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way & the truth & the life; ...I am the true vine!*
 - b. **God** (*vinedresser – who evaluates & tends the branches, including pruning & disposing*).
 - c. **Jesus' disciples** (*incl. us – fruit bearers*). The *fruit* of new disciples; the *fruit* of Christ-like character
 - d. Some would even say the **Holy Spirit** is a *clearly implied & essential* character...
4. We also noted the likelihood that Jesus was reaching back into the **OT** where the *vine* was a symbol of *Israel*.

With that brief review, let's now focus our attention on the very beginning of our text this evening. And I mean the very beginning!

1. Jesus said: "*I am the true vine...*" Perhaps you were already familiar w/ this chapter, but have you ever wondered why Jesus emphasized that He is the **true vine**?
2. Let's start w/ a simple *word study*: the Gr word we translate here as *true* is **alethinos** (adj).
 - a. "*alethinos*" can be understood as *genuine* or *real* (vs. *false*).
 - i. Like a *real coin* vs. a *counterfeit coin*.
 - ii. Or a *genuine Rembrandt* as opposed to a *copy*.

- b. “*alethinos*” can also communicate the idea of *ultimate*, often in spiritual contexts.
- i. Like the *ultimate* realization of a symbol.
 - ii. **E.g.** ...
 1. God fed Israel w/ *manna*. Jesus claimed to be the *true bread* which came down out of heaven.
 2. God prescribed a *spotless lamb* as an atoning sacrifice. Jesus was the *Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*.
 3. *Light* is a frequent symbol of *truth*. John’s Gospel begins by referring to Christ as the *true light*; Jesus identified Himself as the *light of the world* (Jn 8).
 - iii. In every example, the *original* reference is *good*, but Jesus is the *ultimate...the best*.
 1. *Manna* was good, Jesus is the *ultimate bread*.
 2. The *Passover Lamb* was good; Jesus alone takes away the sin of the world.
 3. *Light* is good, Jesus is the embodiment of *light* or *truth*; in His own words: “ He is the way *the truth the life*.”
3. Here (Jn 15) Jesus declares that He is the “*true vine*.” Certainly it is fair to say that His allegory suggests *natural vines*, but as we suggested last week, the *vine* was also an **OT** type of *Israel*.

4. God often used *nature* to suggest *spiritual truth* and we can see that here.
 - a. Certainly the *vine* is a picture of *fruitfulness*, but it's also one of *union* (in fact, *union* is one of the *illustration's* main ideas).
 - i. Where does a *vine* **end** & a *branch* **begin**...?
 - ii. My point is that Jesus is an *individual* yet He is also (as *vine*) **all** of those in *union* w/ Him.
 - iii. Hudson Taylor (CIM) put it this way: Jesus, as the vine, is not only the *root (source)*, He is *everything*!
 - iv. Jesus explained this truth in John 14:20: "*In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*"
 - v. Paul wrote something similar in Col 1:27: *to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.*
 - b. In this sense, Jesus is the *true vine* – the *ultimate location & bond of union* w/ His people, w/ *us*.
5. Israel was God's *vine (vineyard)* and what God said about *Israel* is true of Israel's *Messiah*.
 - a. The **OT** teaches that *Israel* was: Abraham's *seed* (Gen 13:15); God's *Son* (Ex 4:22); & YHWH's *Servant* (Isa 52, etc.).
 - b. All these things are true of *Jesus*.
 - c. Thus Jesus is the *true* or *ideal* or *ultimate* vine. I.e. Jesus is the *true* Israel, the complete *fulfillment* of all Israel was *intended to be* and the one thru whom all of God's *purposes for Israel* could be fulfilled.

“I am the true vine...” As the *true vine*, Jesus is not simply *genuine*, He is *ultimate* – the *highest & finest & fulfilling & final* expression of everything this *symbol suggests*.

Can we apply this *one-word detail* to our Christian *growth*?

Where there is the *promise of true*, there is also the *threat of false*. So there are also, by implication, ***untrue*** – *false* or *lesser* - ***vines***.

1. Whatever is the *center* of your life is your *vine*. Your *source* of energy & joy. *What is it?* Are you *seeking joy* in *untrue vines*?
 - a. Personal *pleasures & goals? Pastimes? Possessions?*
 - b. Even *church*, w/ its comfortable religious *culture & traditions*, can become a *spiritual substitute* for the true *Source of life & joy*.
2. Even more dangerous, *other vines* may be *genuine & good*, but only Jesus is the *ultimate* - the *best*. Have you heard the term “*settling*”? Are you *settling*?
 - a. Are you settling for temporary *satisfaction, joy, help* from a lesser vine: your own *strength* (accomplishments), your *job* (men), a *hobby* (identity, busyness)?
 - b. Are you like *Martha*, settling for *religious bustle*, when you could be *sitting at Jesus’ feet*?

3. How do you make Jesus your *ultimate vine*?

- a. Theologically this picture is simply true of every Christian (Jesus said “*I am the vine, you are the branches.*”). But *theological truths* are often accompanied by *helpful instructions*. (Like the relationship between *justification & sanctification*.)

So...

- b. Ask for help (*pray*). “*Help me grow **toward& in the true Vine.***”
- c. Remember that Jesus is *the Living Word*, you connect w/ Him through the *Written Word* (various ways: QT, preaching, personal study, Christian books/media).
- d. Hang around *others* who are *abiding & bearing much fruit*. Pretty soon you’ll be *more fruitful & joyful & Christ-focused* too!

“*I am the **ultimate vine.***” Why settle for anything *less!?! ...pray...*