

“I am the True Vine ... Abide in me” (John 15:1-4a)

Please turn in the Word of Christ to John 15. C.H. Spurgeon said of this text ‘every word that [Jesus] speaks is precious for his sake: you will be sure, then, to give every syllable its weight, and to let each word fall upon your soul as coming directly from his lips. These are the words of our Lord Jesus just before his departure from the world. We reckon the words of dying men to be worth storing, and especially of such a matchless man as our Lord ... in this chapter, and in that which follows, we have some of the choicest, deepest, and richest words that the Master ever uttered. You will endeavor then, to hear him speaking as upon the verge of Gethsemane; you will listen to these sentences as coming to you associated with the groans and bloody sweat of his agony. These are words...about us and therefore, to be received by us with profound attention ... it is weighty, and demands our ear ... we must give him the heart as well as the ear, and give most earnest heed to the things which he speaks to us, lest by any means we let them slip.’¹

Jn 15:1 *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...*

Andrew Murray wrote *The True Vine: Meditations for a Month on John 15:1-16*. It’s divided into 31 devotionals, 1 for each phrase of the text. The Puritan John Brown wrote 100+ pages on the same verses. Thomas Watson did a whole sermon on just the first 5 words in v. 1 ‘*I am the true vine*’ and another Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote almost 60 pages of small print on the first part of v. 5 ‘*I am the vine, you are the branches.*’ One of my seminary professors, one of the godliest men I’ve known, Dr. Rosscup has a 250-page book on v. 1-8. So this is a deep part of scripture many have dived deep into and I won’t plumb its depths in the next 50-some minutes, or 50 years, but let’s start in v. 1: ‘*I am...*’ Ok, stop there. The first 2 words are our 1st point

1. The DEITY of Christ

This is the 7th and final time Jesus makes an *I am* statement in John's gospel

- John often uses 7 as the number for God or perfection as he proves Jesus is God in 7 discourses, 7 sign miracles proving deity, 7 *I am*’s
- In 8:58 He said ‘*Before Abraham was, I am*’ and the Jewish leaders picked up stones for blasphemy. They knew ‘*I am*’ is claim to deity, it’s the name of God in the OT when Moses asks Yahweh His name

- He said '*I am the bread of life ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven*' (6:48, 51) and He compares it to days of Moses when God sustained Israel in the wilderness: Jesus as God sustains
- He said '*I am the light of the world*' (8:12), i.e., true light of creation like chapter 1, He was the Word in the beginning with God and was God as Creator and light of the world before the sun: 1:1-5, Gen 1:5
- He said '*I am the good shepherd*' (Jn 10:14), i.e., Lord of Psalm 23
- Here '*I am the true vine*' not only speaks of the deity of Christ, note: **2ndly. The EXCLUSIVITY of Christ** (not just deity but exclusivity)

Jesus doesn't say 'I am a vine,' or '*one of many vines,*' meaning one option or source for life. He says '*I am **the true vine,***' it's an exclusive statement to say that. Jesus is not just one of many valid options that all lead to the same Father's vineyard. The implication is He's *The True* vine, the only true one, meaning the others are not true. Jesus alone is the source of the life of God, and He's the only way to be part of the true vineyard of the Father's house.

[In Jn 10 He said 'I am the door,' He's the entrance to heaven]

If you look back at 14:6 Jesus says '*I am **the way, the truth, and the life, no one gets to the Father except by me.***' That's exclusive. He's the narrow road and only way to God the Father in heaven. Jesus isn't 'a way, and whatever way works for you is good for you,' He's THE way. He's not a truth, like in postmodern thought, 'true for you isn't true for me,' 'your truth, my truth, make truth, try truth' (Dr. Suess doctrine). It's not 'here a truth, there a truth every where a truth, truth' (old MacDonald's farm theology). It's not 'have it your way' (Burger King commercial). Truth isn't like a 'choose your own adventure' book. Truth isn't relative, Jesus is **THE** truth, the only truth that leads to **the** life, **the true** vine of abiding eternal life. "***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,***' 11:25

Here in chapter 15 it's clear the only way to have the life of God in you is in your connection to the vine. You have to be connected to Jesus the true vine by faith to have this abiding eternal life. He's the true vine, the truth and life

Which takes us to a 3rd point: the IMAGERY of the vine

There's a lot more behind these 1st five words in v. 1: '*I am the true vine.*' It could be in the upper room there was a vine visible in the window that Jesus compares Himself to. Some think because chapter 14 ends with Him saying '*Let us rise and go*' that Jesus spoke the words of chapter 15 after they left, maybe while they're walking past vineyards or gardens to Gethsemane. It's possible they walked past the temple walls and its famous vines as He spoke

We can't be sure but in 14:31 the '*let us go*' doesn't mean He stopped talking and left immediately. If a preacher says 'in conclusion,' it doesn't mean he's done. Pastor Dale used to say 'do you know what it means if a preacher says "finally"...not much.' But we're in good company with Paul in Phil. 3 as he says "finally" and he still gives 2 more chapters, the other half of the book! These 2 chapters (Jn 15-16) may be similar, wrap up before closing prayer? Our kids know after night church when we say "let's go," if mom and dad keep on talking to adults, "let's go" in that context means something like "be ready to go for whenever the adults stop talking, or at least find your shoes"

Based on Jn 18:1 I think Jn 15 is in the upper room, but their path to Kidron and the garden passed near the temple that had vine and branches ornaments visible at night. They saw it much that week, first Jesus on a donkey entered the temple gate that had a vine decoration on it. 1st century Jewish historian Josephus tells us it was a massive vine with bunches the size of people, its branches made of gold over the temple gate. The vine symbolized Israel. Jesus entered to cleanse the temple, clean house in God's house, driving out false Judaism and corrupt religion out the gate under the vine and branches. That's how He vividly visually began the week where He announced '*I am the true vine.*' First, the false and fruitless had to be purged like Jn 15:2 says

The next morning on the road back to that temple gate, Jesus sees fruitless branches without figs, and He curses the fig tree so the branches withered instantly and never bore fruit again, another symbolic act like taking away of fruitless branches in Jn 15:2. Right after that Jesus walked under the vine and branches monument into the temple, this is all in Mt 21, Jesus taught a parable of a vineyard and 2 sons, then a second parable also of a vineyard, where those working in the vineyard killed the son of the father who owned it. In that parable God took away their place and gave others a place in the vineyard. Then it says the Jewish religious leaders knew that He was talking about them. They had been 'in' the vine like Jn 15:2 in that sense, but God is about to take them out of the vineyard because they're fruitless and faithless.

Over the next couple days of that week Jesus took away false branches and false teachings of each religious group and He took over the temple with its prominent national symbol of Israel, the vine and branches. In that temple Jesus explained the walls and all of it is coming down in judgment, not one stone left on another, including that monument of vine and branches. A day or 2 after that in Jn 15 Jesus says '*I am the true vine...abide in me.*' Israel's vine came down, but those with true faith in the true vine will bear true fruit

The old Covenant believers had to come to a place, a temple with an empty symbol of the vine, but New Covenant believers abide in a Person, Jesus the true vine. In 70 AD as Jesus promised, the temple came down and all those beautiful symbols of Israel, including the vine at its entrance, but a new vine replaces it, the true vine. Jesus is the entrance, the gate, He's the new temple

- Earlier in John's gospel as Jesus cleansed the temple He said, '*destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in 3 days*' and it says He was speaking of His body. Jesus is the true temple that would remain when the other one was destroyed along with its vine symbol, but the true Vine abides
- In Jn 4 He explained true worship is moving from a place to a Person
- In Jn 7 at the end of the feast He showed He's the end feasts pointed to
- After festival lights in the temple went out, Jesus says '*I am the light of the world*,' i.e., true light to keep shining far beyond Israel's temple
- The gospel shows us how Jesus fulfills the temple and its sacrificial system, He's the priest and the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world for all who believe Him, He's the fulfillment of all temple feasts and symbols, He's the temple and its door and the vine above it.

Each day of Passion Week Jesus and His disciples saw the vine symbolizing Israel at the gate of the temple, and Jesus vividly visually had demonstrated what He now confirms verbally: '*I am the true vine*.' In the vine of Israel the false and fruitless were to be taken away, like v. 2 says, while the true were to be pruned, purged to bear more fruit, and that's what these days would do for these disciples. Judas had been in the 12, he had been a branch in them in that sense, but in chapter 13 he was taken out. I think that's what the first part of 15:2 is talking about, false believers who attach themselves on some level to Christianity, but God sees who's fruitless because they're faithless. And God will take them away, but believers He will cultivate to bear fruit. He says to the 11 in v. 3 they were all cleansed by the Word, but in Jn 13:11 when Judas was still in the room Jesus had said '*not all of you are clean*.' He knew Judas had never been inwardly cleansed, Judas was never truly saved.

And when we remember the vine in NT times was a symbol for Israel on its temple, it reminds us there were many in that vine of religion without a true relationship with the true vine. Jesus says '*I am the true vine*' and then for a last time that week before He died, if the traditional sites of the upper room and garden of Gethsemane are right, the disciples passed by the front of the temple with its symbolic vine and branches, or were at least in full view of the temple area. The vine and branches was even a symbol on coins in their pockets of the time, symbolizing Israel like stars and stripes for our nation.

The symbol of vine for Israel is rooted in their Scriptures. In Gen 49, Joseph in Egypt is called '*a fruitful vine...whose branches climb a wall*' (NIV). It pictured Israel as God's people with fruitful branches of blessing for others. Ps 80 later poetically pictures the vine Israel later transplanted in a new land

*O Shepherd of Israel [Ps 80 begins to God], you who lead **Joseph** ... **You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.** ⁹ You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its **branches**. ¹¹ It sent out its **branches to the sea** ... ¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; **have regard for this vine,** ¹⁵ **the stock that your right hand planted,** and for the son [Israel] whom you made strong for yourself. ¹⁶ They [enemies] have burned it with fire; they have cut it down...*

Israel is the vine that was in Egypt with Joseph. God multiplied them there, then transplanted them in a promised land to spread blessings to the sea like branches of a fruitful vine. When Joshua and Caleb spied out the Promised Land they came back with a massive vine and grapes and it became Israel's symbol (Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea,). But in Israel's sin they did not spread blessings like their calling in Genesis, they bore bad fruit and became like God's enemies who burned and broke down God's special vine

[Israel was an unfaithful vine that needed a faithful vine in Jesus]

Isa 5 NIV *I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ² He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines... he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit ... [v. 7 says the Lord's vineyard] is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.* That's the imagery of the vine these Jewish men knew from their OT Scriptures, the vine represented Israel, and the fruit God as vinedresser was looking for was righteousness, that very much fits the imagery of 15:2.

[end of 15:1 says the Father is the vinedresser, like in the OT prophets]

God the Father said in Isa 5:5-6 '*I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there.*' That fits the imagery of John 15:2: normally a vineyard would be pruned, cultivated, the thorns and briers taken away, otherwise it would become a waste like in OT Israel's case. Israel was the vine of God in the OT, but the passages on the vine of Israel before John 15 picture Israel's vine as bearing bad fruit. Israel failed and met judgment. Then Jesus comes and now says *I am the true vine*

There's good fruit through Jesus and good news for us in end of v. 2: God prunes every fruit-bearing branch to bear more fruit. Good news in v. 3 is Christ's followers are cleansed (another term from gardening vineyards). In contrast to fruitless faithless Israel, Jesus the faithful true vine makes sure His true branches are purified, purged, and pruned to bear more fruit. God's cleansing and cutting and chastening is painful but it's to make us fruitful. It doesn't mean God doesn't care when He puts us through difficulty, it means He *does* care as a Father who disciplines wanting us to grow and be fruitful.

[2 Tim 2 says when we're faithless, the Lord remains faithful, PTL!]

The Father faithfully prunes those in Jesus the faithful vine. The vine in the OT was Israel, Jesus basically say in v. 1 *I am the true Israel*. Israel fails but Jesus prevails. Where Israel proved false, He will prove to be true Israel and fulfill all promises in Him. It's not that the church is a replacement of Israel; it's that Christ is the representative of true Israel. It's not that He's through with the Jews or replacing them with Gentiles; it's redefining His people by relationship to Jesus as true Israel. In OT times believers came into Israel, in the days since John 15 believers come into Jesus. Jesus said He didn't come to abolish Israel's Law or prophets, He came to fulfill them (that's Mt 5:17).

Israel wouldn't be abolished but Jesus fulfills her prophets, including Isaiah:

- Isa 5 isn't the final word of the prophet. God says the vine is Israel and it will be cut down in judgment, but Isa 11 says from an old cut stump, from David's family roots, a shoot would rise up, a branch to bear fruit
- Isa 53 said Messiah would grow like a tender young plant, like a root out of dry barren ground, not a majestic or beautiful looking thing but an unattractive shoot that surprisingly would bear much salvation fruit
- Isa 27 talks about the judgment on His vine of Israel but then promises *'In the days to come...Israel will blossom and sprout, and they will fill the whole world with its fruit'* (v. 6 NASB). Only Jesus the true vine can bring the promise about with true Israelites as branches and others grafted in. Isa 60:21 calls those in true Israel, believers in Messiah *'the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.'*
- Isa 55 even poetically pictures branches clapping hands, as we go out with joy, led forth in peace, mountains, fields burst into song before us
- Isa 61, another passage applied to Christ in the NT calls God's people *'the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified...foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers...as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations'* (v. 3, 5, 11). Jesus as the true vine, as true Israel, is telling His Israelite disciples He's the one to fulfill that, and the future for their nation and all nations is in Him for God's glory

Isaiah's prophecies and Jn 15:5 apply to Gentile believers, too: Christ is the vine, we're the branches. We weren't natural branches, in fact Dt 32:32 says of unbelievers: *'their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter.'* But for God's glory He grafts us into His true people! Rom 11 says some of Israel's *'branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root ... do not be arrogant toward the branches...it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you...you were cut...and grafted, contrary to nature ... how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back in ... a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved ... from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen'*

Thomas Watson: 'you who are believers stand and wonder that, when you were by nature the vine of Sodom...a wild vine...poisoned, that God should take such degenerate branches and plant you into Christ ... Oh unfathomable depth of God's love! You who are the branches of this Vine, let me beseech you to love...Let your souls sound forth hallelujahs...Admire God the Father in sending a Vine from heaven; admire God the Son who was a bleeding Vine for you; admire God the [Spirit] who has ... implanted you into this Vine. Turn all your [depressed] discontents into triumphant songs. You are now made living branches that were once dead, holy branches who were once unclean; you now bear grapes who once brought forth thistles. Oh, make melody in your hearts to the Lord! Admire and celebrate free grace ... This Vine, being a plant of renown, casts a glory upon all the branches... Oh, may all the branches of the true Vine flourish with joy!'²

So there's a lot behind the imagery of the vine, point #3, but let's notice also **4th finally (this doesn't mean we're done :) The VITALITY of the Vine**

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.*

Vitality=life, capacity to live and develop, vigor. Vitality can also mean the power of enduring. Spiritually speaking, our vitality is in Jesus, the vine. Our spiritual life is dependent on Him completely, our capacity to develop or endure, all our vigor and vitality is connected to our connection to Jesus. Vital signs mean signs of life, and the vital sign Jesus mentions is fruit. If some never bear fruit, like v. 2 begins with, even though they may associate with or attach themselves to Christianity, v. 2 says God will take away those

They never bore fruit, which shows they never had faith. When the 2nd half of v. 2 mentions others bearing some fruit and pruned to bear more fruit, it confirms the interpretation that the other group didn't bear any. Some never bore fruit, others bore some but were pruned to bear more fruit. If you're not sure if you've ever had true faith or fruit, let me urge you to trust in Christ the true vine, the way, the truth, the life. Your only hope for spiritual life is in being connected to Him, not being a good person, but believing in Jesus and Him alone who shed His blood like the fruit of the vine dying for sins. It's not religion or ritual, He replaced all that and fulfills all that. If you need help trusting Him, my brother closing the service can help or pray with you.

We'll see more next time in v. 6 judgment on people who were visibly 'in' the vineyard like Judas, and in v. 8 how fruit proves who's truly in Christ. 1 Jn 2:19 gives commentary on it from John 15's original hearer and author. But for application today in v. 4, the command is: *abide in me, and I in you*. We'll just introduce this first part of v. 4 today, and continue in it next time. What does abide mean? Let me give you 2 other key words: remain and rely

REMAIN - that's how the NIV translates it here: *remain in me and I in you*.

A synonym for abide is reside, a residence where you're staying or living:

- In John 1 they asked Jesus where He was staying (i.e., his residence)
- The same word is used in the same chapter for the baptism of Jesus where the Spirit descends like a dove and remains, resides on Jesus
- In 8:35 Jesus said in the father's house '*the son does remain forever*'
- This Greek word translated abide here often means abode, dwelling
- In that sense Jesus is saying in v. 4 *remain in me, reside in me, stay in me, make your dwelling in me, live in me, and let me live in you*.
- How does that work? I think v. 7 helps when He says '*if you abide in me* [same as v. 4] *and my words abide in you* [there the '*I in you*' abiding part is the words of Christ, so it's not a mystical mysterious thing, it's like Col 3:16 '*let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly*']
- We'll study that more next time when we get to v. 7 but a practical way to abide in Christ and Him in us is by staying in His Word and keeping His Word in us, making Scripture part of our life so we can make ourselves at home in it, reading, residing in it, remaining in it

RELYING is the 2nd aspect of abiding in this context. As a branch relies on the vine for its life, we must continually and consciously rely on Christ for all we do. Like branches need sap and sustenance and strength from a vine or tree, we need to rely on Christ for sustaining grace, strength, spiritual life

Psalm 104:16 says *'the trees of the LORD are full of sap'* (NKJV, or NAS *'trees of the LORD drink their fill,'* footnote says *'lit. are satisfied'*). Drink of me and you will have life, Jesus said (Jn 4:14, 6:54), it's how we abide in Him and He in us (6:56). Like juice through a vine or blood through a vein, we desperately need the spiritual lifeblood of Jesus in us flowing through us

[2 questions: are you relying on Christ? Are you remaining in His Word?]

If remaining involves Christ's Word, relying involves our words to Christ in prayer. Abiding in Christ isn't just about His speaking to us in Scripture, it's also us speaking to Him. To rely I have to recognize Christ and my need of Him through the day, and rely on Him for strength. I have to realize like the end of v. 5 says apart from Christ I can do nothing. Abiding=trust the Lord and lean not on your own understanding, acknowledge Him in all your ways

David applied it this way in Ps 16:8 *'I set the Lord continually before me, because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken.'* Paul applied it this way *'the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God'* (Phil 4). Then he says relying or abiding in that way brings peace, and us setting our mind on what's good and right and so on from His Word, that's abiding by His Word remaining in our thinking, then abiding by applying it, that's how Paul applies what Jesus is talking about. Study that more in Phil 4 for more practical application of v. 4 in our text, abiding or relying so you can do all things through Christ strengthening and supplying all your needs in the vine

Are you abiding in Christ? Are you relying on Christ in prayer, in practical ways in your thinking throughout the day? Are you remaining in His Word, is His Word remaining in you? You can today, spend time in Christ's Word, Phil 4 or wherever, spend time in prayer for the things it talks about there. If you don't have a regular time each day where you abide in His Word and in prayer, start this week, it may mean setting your alarm 15 minutes earlier. It is a command from the King to abide in v. 4 but He says it for our joy, v. 11

When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!

While we do His good will He **abides** with us still, and with all who will trust and obey
Trust and obey! For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus

Our closing song was written by a pastor at the close of his life in 1847 who when he knew he could no longer abide with his loving church family. As he watched the sun set over the ocean, he was meditating on Jn 15:4 *'Abide in Me and I in you'* (where Jesus knowing His impending death spoke that to His church). He wrote a prayer shortly before he died, later set to music³

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide [think of ocean tides and sun falling on horizon]
 The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide! When other helpers fail and comforts flee
 Help of the helpless [he wrote this as his health was radically failing], O abide with me...

I need Thy presence ev'ry passing hour; What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
 [He understood abiding as daily relying and trusted the Lord's abiding presence] Who, like
 Thyself, my guide and stay can be? Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless; Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness:
 Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
 Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
 Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
 In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.⁴

¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, "A Sharp Knife for the Vine Branches," Sermon # 774,
Metropolitan Tabernacle Sermons, vol. 13, p. 553.

² Thomas Watson, *A Plea to the Godly and Other Sermons* (Soli Deo Gloria), 408-9.

³ *More Real Stories for the Soul*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 171–172.

⁴ Henry Lyte, "Abide with Me."