

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The True Vine, the Vinedresser, and the Branches John 15:1-3

In the Christian life there might be times when we might be tempted to be filled with self-doubt concerning the genuineness of our salvation, especially when we have someone messed up.

And in the midst of those times there needs to be a way for us to reaffirm the genuineness of our faith and this morning text I believe will help us in this regard.

Hopefully you remember that we are now studying what is known as Christ's farewell discourse which is recorded for us beginning in John 13:31 and does not conclude until John 17:26.

In this text we have already seen how Jesus had very clearly identified for us Judas as His betrayer. But even though we might have been able to see how clearly Jesus had done this, it obviously was not as clear to His own disciples. Even though they knew there was going to be a betrayer, it was not obvious to them who that betrayer might be.

Now project yourself forward in time after the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and coming of the church. Project yourself forward to the early days of the church when these same disciples, perhaps in the midst of a personal failure, might be tempted to have some self-doubt concerning them selves. Perhaps thinking, "maybe I am just like Judas, maybe I am not as for real in respect to who I say that I am than I think."

Jesus prepared them to deal with that possible self-doubt in the passage we will be looking at this morning. Jesus prepared them to deal with that possible self-doubt by providing them an analogy in John 15:1-3.

This morning we will be examining that analogy. More specifically, this morning we will be examining the elements of that analogy and in doing so hopefully we will hopefully be prepared to deal with our own potential self-doubt in the same way as Christ had prepared His disciples to deal with their potential doubts. So, what are those elements?

The first element of Christ's analogy in John 15:1-3 was "the true vine" (John 15:1). Let me read for you the very first part of **John 15:1**. What did Jesus say? He said, **"I am the true vine."**

So, if Jesus identified Himself as "the true vine," then who was not "the true vine"? When Jesus said that He was the true vine, He implied that Israel was not (Isaiah 5:1-7).

Israel, certainly from the standpoint of the Old Testament Scriptures, would have been considered a vine, even a vine that God had planted; but they were not the true vine. They couldn't have been the true vine for the simple reason that they, in spite of their special relationship with God as His covenant people, had not brought forth the proper fruit.

Let me read for you **Isaiah 5:1-7**. **"Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.**

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(2) And He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. (3) And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. (4) What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? (5) So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. (6) And I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it. (7) For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah His delightful plant."

In the Old Testament was Israel God's vineyard and the men of Judah His delightful plant? Yes! They were! But even though Israel was God's vineyard and the men of Judah His delightful plant they failed the Lord by not producing what they should have produced in light of who they were and in light of all that the Lord had done for them, but this certainly was not true of Christ. Christ was "the true vine" and He was producing exactly what His Father had intended Him to produce throughout His life and would continue to produce exactly what His Father had intended Him to produce even as He went to the cross as His Father's sacrificial lamb. And where did all of this abundant and glorious production come from on the part of Christ? It came as a direct outflow of His relationship with His Father.

Isn't this something that Christ made very clear to His enemies in **John 5:19** when He told them, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner."** Jesus was not an independent operator. He dutifully and lovingly committed Himself to do exactly what His Father wanted Him to do and thus demonstrated Himself to be the true vine.

So, what was the first element of the analogy that Christ provided His disciples in **John 15:1-3**? The first element of the analogy was "the true vine," which Jesus identified as Himself. We now come to the second element of the analogy in **John 15:1-3**.

The second element of the analogy in John 15:1-3 was "the vinedresser." Let us once again look at **John 15:1** but this time let us read a little bit further. **"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."**

So who was the vinedresser? Who was the one pictured as caring for the vine? Jesus identified His Father as the vinedresser or as the one who cared for the vine.

And how in **John 15:1-3** was the vinedresser's care for the vine or Christ manifested?

The answer to this question brings us to the third element of this analogy and to the heart of the lesson that Christ was seeking to communicate to His disciples.

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The third element of the analogy in John 15:1-3 are "the branches." Let me read for you **John 15:2**. **"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit."** So how did Christ's Father extend care to Him in this analogy? Christ's Father extended care to Him by taking care of the branches pictured as attached to Him.

But before we specifically talk about how Christ's Father is pictured as caring for the branches, we first of all need to identify who these branches are. And who are they?

I believe that the answer to this question is found by looking at the context in which this allegory is placed or more specifically by looking at the characters that made up the drama recorded for us in **John 13 and 14**.

So who were those characters? On the one hand there was Judas who feigned or pretended to love Christ but who in truth only loved Himself, and then there were the remaining eleven disciples who did not feign or pretend to love Christ but who actually in fact did love Him, perhaps immaturely at times, but they did love Him and enjoyed a personal relationship with Him. Therefore if this is true then what can we conclude?

Based on the characters that made up the drama in John 13 and 14, the fruitless branches would represent false disciples like Judas and the fruitful branches would represent true disciples like the eleven.

So if this is true then why would Christ refer to the "fruitless branches" in **John 15:2** as being "in Me" if they were in fact like Judas, false disciples. And this is the answer: We should not look at the phrase "in Me" in this verse as a technical theological expression but rather simply as a convenient expression to paint a picture of how various people who had publicly attached themselves to Him might be viewed. This would be consistent with the literary genre of an allegory.

Therefore the key in understanding this word picture painted for us by Christ in John 15 should not be determined by individual words, such as "in Me," but rather by the picture these individual words paint in light of the context. And this is the reason why I said to you, "Based on the characters that made up the drama in John 13,14 the fruitless branches would represent false disciples like Judas and the fruitful branches would represent true disciples like the eleven.

And if this is true, then a person, such as ourselves, should be able to tell whether or not they are a true disciple of Christ rather than a false disciple of Christ by looking at the fruit that is being manifested in and through their lives. So let us look at this fruit and see specifically what it is.

The fruit that God is looking for in the lives of those who have publicly attached themselves to Christ is the fruit that is produced as an outflow of a genuine relationship with Christ. This is what God is looking for. He is looking for words, thoughts, actions, and attitudes that are flowing out of our relationship with Christ.

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So, what determines whether or not we are a true disciple or a false disciple? Fruit! Not just any kind of fruit but only that fruit that is produced as an outflow of a genuine relationship with Christ.

So based on this understanding, are you a false or true disciple of Christ? Do you see your life as an extension of Christ or do you see your life as an extension someone or something else?

Some professing Christians might think that this is too difficult of a question to answer. But this should not be the case at all. Certainly this was not the case with the Apostle Paul. He knew exactly whom his life was an extension of. What did Paul say in **Philippians 1:21**? He said, "**For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**"

So once I again let me ask you, who is your life an extension of? Is it Christ or someone or something else? I am continuing to ask you this question until you are willing to answer it because it is an extremely important question. Why?

Fruitless branches will be taken away (John 15:2). Isn't this exactly what Christ told His disciples in **John 15:2**? He said "**Every branch in Me** [those who have publicly attached themselves to me] **that does not bear fruit, He takes away.**" So, what does Jesus mean?

The answer is given to us in **John 15:5-6**. Let me read these verses for you. "**I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide in Me** [who is not spiritually attached to me but perhaps only publicly attached to me], **he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**" So, what does Christ mean when He speaks of fruitless branches being taken away? When Christ speaks of fruitless branches being taken away He is speaking of them being taken away by His Father in the final judgment (John 15:5-6).

So why is it so important for us to answer the question of whether or not we are a true or false disciple? Why is it so important for us to answer the question as to whether we see ourselves as an extension of Christ's life or simply as an extension someone or something else? It is because fruitless branches will be taken away, will be taken away in God's final judgment.

But what about the fruitful branches? How will Christ's Father as the vinedresser deal with them?

Fruitful branches will be pruned so that they might bear more fruit (John 15:2). Isn't this exactly what Christ also tells His disciples in **John 15:2**? Let me read it for you. "**And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.**"

Anyone who has ever driven through the vineyards in northern California will understand what the Lord is talking about in this regard. In the winter all you will see for miles is bare, twisted trunks. But in the summer you will see endless rows of lush grapevines full of fruit. The truth is that a grapevine will never produce anywhere near its potential without being pruned! And the same thing can be said for the true disciples of Christ.

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Pruning to the uninitiated eye may look like a cruel and wasteful process but it is the only way to grow healthy, delicious fruit. The same is true in terms of a true disciple of Christ.

God's pruning process is painful but it is good for us (Psalms 119:71). David said in **Psalms 119:71, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Thy statutes."**

When God prunes us He exposes us. When God prunes us through whatever means He might choose, it is always painful, because we are forced in the pruning not only to see our sin, not only to acknowledge our sin, but also with a godly sorrow to confess our sin.

So let me ask you this question. Is God's pruning process always good for us? Of course it is good for us!

And then He says this to His disciples in **John 15:3, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."** Why would Jesus say this? Jesus told His disciples that they were already clean in order to distinguish what He had just said about the need of pruning for greater fruitfulness from God's work of justification.

Had the disciples already been cleansed or justified by faith? Yes they had already been cleansed, all except for Judas. All this was made clear in **John 13:1-13.**

But even though they had been cleansed there was much for them yet to experience in respect to sanctification or in becoming more like Him. And the same thing is true for us if we are true disciples of Christ.

But don't despair, God the vinedresser is at work and will prune us so that we might bear more fruit, that Christ's life might be more clearly manifested through out lives.

May God give us the grace when being pruned by God to rejoice in the prospect of our increasing fruitfulness as we see Christ's growing influence over our lives