

## The True Vine (John 15:1–8)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (6/5/2022)

### I. Background

1. The last of the seven “I-AM” statements of John’s Gospel is found in John 15:1—“*I am the true vine.*” All seven “I-AM” declarations are *metaphors* (a figure of speech to represent something else). Each of the “I-AM” statements in John describes a characteristic of the person of Christ. Jesus is (1) “*the bread of life*” (6:35), not that He is literal bread but as bread is food to sustain physical life, Jesus is spiritual food sustaining the spiritual life of His followers. Jesus is (2) “*the light of the world*” (8:12); (3) “*the door of the sheep*” (10:7, 9); (4) “*the good shepherd*” (10:11, 14); (5) “*the resurrection and the life*” (11:25); (6) “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (14:14); and (7) here in John 15, He is “*the true vine*” (15:1).
2. All of these “I-AM” statements relate to the divine name revealed to Moses: “*I AM WHO I AM*” (Exodus 3:14, 15). This is the name by which He entered covenant with Israel (Exodus 6:4, 5). In that declaration, the Lord promised three things: (1) He would redeem Israel; (2) He would identify them as His people and be their God; (3) He would bring them into His earthly kingdom, the land and people He promised to Abraham.
3. Jesus took that eternal name, *Yahweh* (I am that I am), for Himself and identified as the God of Israel. Under this name He established the New Covenant with the people of God, promising to redeem them, to make them His own, and establish His kingdom. He introduced His purpose to the people of Judah, “*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43). Paul also argues this truth in Romans 11.
4. The second part of Jesus’ farewell discourse (John 15:1–16) was probably given to the disciples as they left the upper room and walked through the streets of Jerusalem on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. This part of the discussion has two parts. The first eight verses set forth the metaphor of the vine; the second eight verses explain it.

The sovereignty of God is the foundation of the reestablishment of His eternal kingdom, replacing the rotten fruit of Adam’s disobedience resulting in the worldly kingdom usurped by the god of this world. The farewell discourse (John 14–16) explains God’s purpose to restore through the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, what the first Adam lost. The second section of the discourse closes with a powerful declaration of Christ’s sovereignty (v.16).

### II. The Metaphor Examined

1. The *vine* metaphor stands for the kingdom of God established in the world. The psalmist declared, “*You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it* (Psalm 80:8–10). Hosea wrote, “*Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit*” (Hosea 10:1).

Moses addressed God’s purpose and prophesied the nation’s rebellion in Deuteronomy 32:17, 31–33. The psalmist lamented its condition (Psalm 80:11–13). Hosea revealed the reason for the Lord’s displeasure, idolatry (Hosea 10:1, 2).

However, the godly psalmist cried out, “*Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself*” (Psalm 80:8–15). The Lord answered this prayer, and Jesus declared, “*I am the true vine.*” Jesus would accomplish what the old-covenant vine failed to accomplish.

2. The players in the metaphor are introduced in the first two verses. Jesus stated very simply that He was the vine replacing the old-covenant vine, Israel. Jesus is the core of Christian faith, being the

source of eternal life, sustaining the branches in the vine. His Father is the vine dresser. The disciples, and by extension, all true Christ-followers are the branches abiding in the vine.

3. The duties of these players are clearly stated.

- a. The Father prunes the branches. Pruned branches bear more and better fruit. Pruning often results in hardships to the branches, but it is necessary in the sanctifying work for holiness to which they were called (Hebrews 12:7, 10, 11).
- b. He also removes branches that bear no fruit. Commentators have offered various explanations for these fruitless branches; however, the metaphor must not be pressed beyond its simple and clear truth: branches, in order to bear fruit, must *remain (abide)* (v. 5).

Abiding or remaining is the duty of every branch, but again, the language must not be taken beyond the simple truth given. As stated earlier, Jesus declared, *“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”* (v. 16). Paul, in Romans 11, addressed the same sovereign principle in salvation. It is the elect, the remnant chosen by grace, that obtain life from the vine. Paul uses an olive tree, but the principle is the same (Romans 11:17).

- c. Jesus assured the disciples, *“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you”* (v. 3), repeating the assurance He gave them in John 13:10. (See 1 Corinthians 6:9, 11.)
- d. Finally, there is also a direct correlation between abiding in Christ and His word’s abiding in us and our praying (v. 7). When these things are as they should be, the Father is glorified because His work is successful, and the believing branch bears much fruit and proves its position in Christ.

## Lessons

1. To summarize the metaphor, Jesus declares that He is the true vine. All whom the Father grafted into the vine live by His life and are fruitful in holiness. They are *clean*, that is judicially holy. Jesus was leaving the disciples because He was going to the cross to pay their sin debt. Because they were His, He declared them clean: *“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”* His word, which is the truth, is God’s means to declare our condition. Do you believe it?
2. The evidence that we are in the vine is our remaining or abiding in Him. This is the perseverance of the saints. *“If you abide [continue or remain] in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:31, 32). The fruit we bear testifies to what Paul states is *“the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”* (Ephesians 4:24). It is Christ in us by His Spirit and His Word. Do you believe it, and does your life show it?
3. We are not perfect, but because we remain in Him, we will bear fruit unto holiness. As we are obedient, our fruitfulness increases—more fruit (v. 2) and much fruit (v. 5). The amount of fruit we bear rests on our cooperation with the Father’s pruning work, the discipline which *“yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”* (Hebrews 12: 11).