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“I Am the Vine” (John 15:1-8)

An important question for us to consider is how does one go about living out the Christian life in the challenging environment of the Capitol? How do we demonstrate Christian character, Christ-likeness, and the fruit of the Spirit? Any true believer who is genuinely interested in living a life pleasing to God is concerned about how to truly live the Christian life in the various contexts in which we find ourselves. These include family, work, neighborhood, or service here in the statehouse.

In the last of His great “I Am” statements, Jesus gives us the secret of living out the Christian life in every location, situation, or environment.

¹I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

(John 15:1-8)

These are Jesus’ last words to His disciples before He is arrested and carried away to be crucified. He is getting ready to leave them and is preparing them for life without His physical presence among them. In doing so, He uses a vivid object lesson to proclaim tremendous spiritual truth: “I am the true vine...”

A VIVID ILLUSTRATION

The Vine

Jesus proclaims here that He is “the True Vine”. Again He is claiming to be the only source of spiritual life. We must be joined to Him through faith in His death for us on the cross. We must maintain a close fellowship and communion with Him if we are to live a truly fruitful Christian life.

The Vinedresser

Jesus informs us God the Father is the vinedresser. This means that He is responsible for the care of the vines and the branches. Proper handling of the vines requires a tremendous amount of loving, skillful care. This is demonstrated most clearly in the pruning of the branches. The words “prunes” (vs. 2) and “clean” (vs. 3) are closely related. What may seem to be a harsh, damaging process is actually what is needed for the vine to produce the most fruit possible. This pruning is not necessarily a response and removal of that which is wrong and sinful in our lives. It may even be God’s work in dealing with what may be “good” or “better” in order that we may experience the “best” fruitfulness possible. This is why James can exhort us to **“count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience...”** (James 1:2-3).

The Branches

Those who are or claim to be Jesus’ followers are the branches. Jesus refers to two kinds of branches, fruitless and fruitful. In referring to fruitless branches, He may either be referring to people who have professed a belief in Christ but are not true believers, or to those who are indeed true followers of Christ but are living fruitless lives. In the case of those who were never true believers, the fire of which Jesus speaks is that of eternal judgment. If, on the other hand He is speaking of true believers living fruitless lives, He is speaking of the fires of God’s discipline, the loss of rewards, and even physical death. It may well refer to people who profess faith in Christ but have never truly believed in Him. Consequently, they have no real relationship with Christ, and no real fruit.

The Fruit

What is the fruit Jesus speaks of here? There are several forms of spiritual fruit mentioned in scripture. **Winning others to Christ** is considered harvesting fruit (Romans 1:13, John 4:35-38). When we experience **growth in holiness and obedience** we are said to be bearing fruit. (Romans 6:22) In Romans 15:28 Paul considered **Christian giving** to be an expression of the fruit of a dedicated life. Vital **Christian character qualities** are known as the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). A Christian’s **good works** are described as the result of a fruitful life (Colossians 1:10). Praising and worshipping God is called the “fruit of our lips” (Hebrews 13:15). All of these may be wrapped up in the idea of the fruit of which Jesus speaks. “Fruit” is the outward results of the life we have because of our relationship with Christ.¹ We should note the progression of fruit bearing in a person’s life. Jesus talks about those who bear **no fruit** (vs. 2), **fruit** (vs. 3), **more fruit** (vs. 3), and **much fruit** (vs. 5). It is the work of God in our lives that brings about more fruitfulness. It should be our goal to submit to His word and His work in such a way we will be more and more fruitful as time goes by.

Abiding In Christ

Abiding is a key theme running throughout all of John’s writings. The word is used eleven times here in 15:1-11, and forty times throughout his gospel. He also speaks of abiding twenty-seven times in his letters. The word literally means to tarry, remain, dwell, or live in a particular location. The word therefore has the idea of “permanence of position, occupying a place as one’s dwelling place, holding and maintaining unbroken communion and fellowship with another.” It speaks of maintaining a constant, close communion with Him. Abiding in Christ begins at our salvation when we are placed “in Christ”. However there is a relationship with Him that must be maintained and cultivated on a daily, moment by moment basis if we are to lead fruitful lives. We gather our strength from Him as our lives are filled with His energy and resources. We have a living relationship with Him and belong to Him. John goes on to give us an idea of what is involved in abiding in Christ.

The Word of God In verse seven Jesus relates abiding in Him to allowing His word to abide in us. Seeking to study God’s Word and apply it to our lives is essential to abiding in Christ. Paul touches on this when he writes, “**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...**” (Colossians 3:16).

Obedience In verse 10 Jesus goes on to say that abiding in Him is dependent upon obeying His commands. Obedience to Christ and to His word are a

sign that one is a true believer and a necessity to abiding in Him!

Results of Abiding In Christ

John lays out the dynamic results of our abiding in Christ. The first obviously is the **bearing of spiritual fruit**. Next we see that the believer will experience **answered prayer** (vs. 7.) Further, John informs us the abiding believer will **demonstrate love (vs. 10)** for their fellow believers. Lastly, John points out that believers who are abiding in Christ will **experience joy (vs. 11)** in their lives.

A POWERFUL MESSAGE

The real emphasis of this illustration is the importance of abiding in Christ. This is clearly laid out in Jesus’ statement, “**For without me, you can do nothing**” (vs. 5). Certainly Jesus means that we can accomplish nothing on our own with regard to salvation. He also refers to the fruit that any believer would seek to express in their lives. We can only bear fruit in our lives by having faith in Him for salvation, and abiding in Him through knowing and obeying His word. A fruitful life requires a total dependence upon Him to work in our lives, causing us to grow to be more like Him.

Conclusion

Any true believer will want to exhibit the fruit of Christian character in their lives, even in the challenging environment of the Capitol. Jesus’ claim to be the true vine should cause us to ask ourselves some important questions:

- This passage gives us reason to examine our lives to determine if we are genuinely abiding in Christ. Is there real fruit in our lives to demonstrate we have His life in us?
- Are we seeking to abide in Christ on a daily, moment by moment basis? Are we seeking to study and obey His word in all areas of our life?
- Are we surrendered to God’s pruning process in our lives? Do we believe that he is good and loving and do we trust him to do what is best for our good and His glory?

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays,

8:00 AM Governor’s Conference Room (Sec. of State’s Ofc)

12:00 Noon Treasurer’s Conference Room (EB54,

Basement of East Wing)