

Abiding in the Vine

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The true Vine

As Jesus journeyed with His disciples from the first communion meal to the garden of Gethsemane, He spoke with them about the vine, the vinedresser and the branches. Today, we will consider His teaching as we revisit and reemphasise some of what we have heard over the past weeks and months concerning the importance of eating and drinking the communion meal in a worthy manner.

As we have heard lately, we are to no longer live and function from our own darkened perspective that is the result of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Instead, we are to find the joy, peace and light of life of eating and fellowshiping at the tree of life.

Having concluded the first communion meal, which we also know as ‘the last supper’, with the singing of a hymn, Jesus and His disciples then journeyed from the upper room to the Mount of Olives and to the garden of Gethsemane. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus told His disciples, ‘I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every 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. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.’ Joh 15:1-3.

Jesus was describing to us the corporate body of Christ. The many fruitful branches are the members of His body, who, by offering, are bringing forth the fruit of the vine. The life coming to the branches is from Yahweh, the Root, through Christ, the Vine. ‘The fruit of the vine’ is the divine nature of sonship, expressing the fruit of the Spirit – which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Gal 5:22. Peter also said that if we are to abound in fruitfulness we must show diligence to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love. 2Pe 1:5-8.

This fruit (the grape) is the result of offering, and is for offering. The juice of the grape from the vine was used by the Old Testament priests for a drink offering, which was poured out on another person’s offering. The drink offering was always prepared along with the grain offering. Paul expressed this in the reality of the New Covenant when he said, ‘I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith.’ Php 2:17. We are the offering poured out. Here is the practical reality of our communion. The juice of the grape that each member drinks was produced by the offering of Christ, to whom we are joined. Also, the juice of the grape is for a drink offering. Therefore, in our drinking, we are to be pouring ourselves out on the sacrifice of another. Our communion meal is us joining Christ’s offering, and making offering toward one another.

It is the absence of offering that causes a branch to bear no fruit. As Jesus said, ‘Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.’ Joh 15:2. Every branch has the divine nature, but not every branch pours themselves out as a drink offering on another. For this reason, they are unfruitful.

Our focus today is the 'vine', but it is only one of several descriptions that the Scriptures give us regarding the church and its fruit. We have been hearing teaching on the lampstand, which is the almond tree; the fruit of the almond tree, which is light. The fruit of the olive tree is oil that is poured out to light the lamp of the lampstand. The other is the fig tree that gives its figs for food and healing.

The Father is the Vinedresser

In His teaching, Jesus immediately acknowledged His Father as the Vinedresser. The vinedresser plants the vine and watches over the vine, the branches and the fruit. The desire of the vinedresser is that the branches would bring forth more fruit. We have been named by the Father; He has birthed us as His sons; and He is watching over us. He has made us members of the true Vine, and His word has made us clean. He is caring for His vine and branches. Let us note the precious words that Isaiah wrote: 'In that day sing to her, "A vineyard of red wine! I, the LORD, keep it, I water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day".' Isa 27:2-3.

During this unique time of restriction, we have come to understand the Father as the Vinedresser, and His love and care for us as His sons. He has purposed these times so that He might prune us, and deliver us from our fallen perspectives and false gospels.

As we have drawn aside in these past three months, and the word of the messenger has come to us as the command of the Father, the word has exposed our false gospels, our worthless doctrines, and fruit taken from the wrong tree. The Father, as the Vinedresser, has been looking intently at each branch, and has been pruning us by His word. I know that, as I have received the word that has been ministered each week, His word has pruned me and made me clean.

For all who have received His word, will you, today, also receive the words that Jesus spoke to His disciples? 'You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.' Joh 15:3. Each week, as you have participated in Him who is true, by receiving the word and participating in the communion meal at the tree of life, you have been abiding in the vine. The Father is pruning you and you are now able to bring forth fruit as you are joined in offering, revealing Christ and His life.

The branch

Jesus continued His teaching regarding the branches by instructing His disciples to abide in Him, and He in us, to bring forth the fruit of His life. He said, 'Abide 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. 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. If 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 are burned.' Joh 15:4-6.

A branch of a vine is to bring forth the fruit for the drink offering. If we are not abiding in the Vine and being pruned to bring forth fruit, we will be cast off and burned. This can be quite confronting to accept. We need to know that we are branches that have no other purpose other than to bring forth fruit.

Ezekiel said about vine branches, 'The word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work?" ' Eze 15:1-4.

We must heed, and take serious note of, the words of Jesus, 'Without Me you can do nothing. If 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.' Joh 15:5-6.

Here is another clear lesson that we have learned in this season. When we are having thoughts of promoting ourselves, trying to be 'like God', or are looking to gain power or to become someone of importance, we are clearly eating from another tree. We know this because, of itself, the branch of the vine is nothing. When we are 'carving' a name for ourselves, we are eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Nothing can be carved from a branch of the vine. Unless we are abiding in Christ, if we will not receive the word that cleanses and prunes us, we will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

In John Hay's notes from the 21st of June, the point was made that, when we suffer, we need to cry out to God for wisdom and understanding. We must learn that we cannot bear fruit of ourselves. We cannot continue to be what the Father has not named us to be. We must cease from thinking that we can have a function other than what the Father has named for us. As Jesus stated, 'For without Me you can do nothing.' Joh 15:5.

We are the branch, Christ is the Vine. We have no life in ourselves. Our life that we live by is the life of Christ. In Christ, we are part of the Vine and are to live by the life of the Vine. Paul expressed it in this way: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.' Gal 2:20.

When I abide in the Vine, I am eating from the tree of life; I am eating His flesh and drinking His blood; I have joined His death. My sin died with Christ. I have ceased from living and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and from defining my own name. I no longer live according to my own darkened perspectives, because I am proclaiming His death that I have joined. I am dead to living by my own righteousness and 'good' efforts. The life that I now live every day as a branch, I live by abiding in Christ who, as the Vine, is the Tree of Life. It is here that I live by His faith. I have received His faith by abiding in the word that I have received by His messengers when I eat the communion from the tree of life.

Abiding

What did Jesus mean when He said, 'Abide in Me, and I in you'? Joh 15:4. To 'abide' is to remain and be one Spirit with Christ, the Vine. To abide is totally relational. Jesus said in His statement, 'I' and 'you'. He was speaking of an intimate and personal relationship and fellowship. This relationship is not possible if we are eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When we stop abiding, we are removed from the life and love of God. The relationship is, therefore, replaced by a rule or law. Paul identified this way of not abiding as 'living by another law'. In Romans, he stated, 'I see another law in my members.' Rom 7:23. The law that he identified was 'other than' the law of love, and 'other than' the life found in a relationship. When he cried out, 'O wretched man that I am!', he did not ask 'what' will deliver me; rather, he asked, 'Who will deliver me?' Rom 7:24.

So often we want the life found in Christ the Vine, but we also want to do something of ourselves. We revert to our other law, and lean on our own understanding. We want someone to give us a strategy which we can employ to live a good life. This is the way of the flesh that, sadly, many Christians have adopted. Going to seminars or reading the latest self-help book on tips for a better Christian life will not deliver us. Any way, other than abiding in the offering and fellowship of Christ expressed by His seven wounding

events will not deliver us. It is not about 'What shall deliver me?' Rather, His life is totally relational: 'Who shall deliver me?' To abide is to remain joined to the crucified Christ.

When Jesus spoke these words, 'Abide in Me and I in you', He had just given the disciples the bread and the wine. He had clearly explained to them what these elements truly mean. 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you ... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.' Joh 6:53,56. So, we are left with no doubt or uncertainty regarding the gospel of sonship. The gospel of sonship is to remain joined to His offering. When we eat the communion, we are not proclaiming that we are endeavouring to be a son of God who is trying to bring forth the fruit of Christ by our good intentions. Rather, we proclaim that, without abiding in His wounds, and without remaining joined to His offering journey, we are only fit for the fire. We proclaim the Lord's death for as long as we have breath, by abiding in His wounds.

We also abide in Him by His words abiding in us. As Jesus taught His disciples, 'If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you.' Joh 15:7. The word we hear at the communion meal are His words, and these words are to be lodged in us so that we live by the word that we receive. We remain in this word and live by it. We can only receive His word when we have received it as one who is poor in spirit, not as one who is trying to be 'like God'. We must let His words remain in us, and live by the word that we have received. We must cease from our 'mixed salad' of trying to live at two trees. When we come to the communion with the words of our other law, and then mix it with the word we hear at the communion, we will become confused, and we will not know the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Ask what you desire

As we continue to read Jesus' teaching in John Chapter 15, the second part of verse seven continues, 'You will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.' Joh 15:7. This statement, 'Ask what you desire and it shall be done for you', has become misused and misunderstood as an expectation that Jesus is ready to give people all of their self-centred desires. Many people grow angry with Jesus because He has not given them what they have asked. Some feel that they must have done something wrong, and that Jesus is punishing them because He has not answered the prayers of their desire. Others even say they cannot trust God because they did not receive what they asked for.

When we think this way, we clearly have given no regard to the context in which Jesus made this precious promise. This promise of answered prayer is spoken in the context of us abiding with Him in His suffering journey. It is in the context of us receiving His word and remaining in it, having let His word prune us and cleanse us. To put it plainly and simply, He hears the prayer of the one who is abiding and eating from the tree of life. He does not make this promise to the one who is sitting and eating at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

When Adam and Eve removed themselves from the fellowship of the tree of life and lived by the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, what happened? Did the Lord call out across the garden, saying, 'Hi there, Adam and Eve. I see that you are not abiding in My word and fellowship. I notice you are now living by another word. Well, I just want you to know that, if you ask what you desire, it will be done for you.' Similarly, Jesus would not be watching us mixing the fruit of the two trees and call across the garden, as we eat from the wrong tree, 'Ask what you desire and it will be done for you.'

His promise is totally connected to our abiding in Christ and His word abiding in us. It has everything to do with us bringing forth the fruit of a son of God according to the

name that the Father has given us. Christ desires that the Father be glorified. He is only glorified when we do the works that He has purposed. When we are crucified with Christ and abide in His offering, we will receive the word that prunes us, and we will bring forth the fruit of His naming. 'By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.' Joh 15:8.

Disciples bearing much fruit

We will finish our exhortation today by urging one another to receive the word of the Father proclaimed by Christ's messengers. This is how we are to abide in the true Vine and to be disciples of Christ and not of another gospel.

The Father, as the Vinedresser, is looking for the fruit that glorifies Him. His pruning instrument is His word spoken by those who are in Christ. It may come as a 'goad', a 'two-edged sword' or a 'rod'. Its purpose is to prune and make us clean. The Greek word for 'prune' and the word for 'clean' are connected.

The Father is watching over you and desires that you would be clean and fruitful. He has no desire to cut you off. You are His son. He is speaking to you and, if you receive what He is saying, you will be clean and you will bring forth fruit. This will not be the fruit of your own hands, but the precious fruit that He has purposed by His love.

As we abide in the Vine and remain in His word, He will continue to prune us so that we bring forth more fruit. By this fruit, the Father is glorified and we will know that we are true disciples of Christ.

We will conclude with the example of 'the fruitful branches of the vine' being our communion participation. The juice of the grape that each member drinks was produced by the offering of Christ, to whom we are joined. Also, the juice of the grape is for a drink offering. Therefore, in our drinking, we are to be pouring ourselves out on the sacrifice of another. Our communion meal is us joining Christ's offering, and making offering toward one another. Paul said, 'I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.' Php 2:17. We are the offering poured out. As we eat and drink the communion, we are being poured out as an offering on the sacrifice of our brothers and sisters. May this be the joy of our communion fellowship today and throughout this coming week.