John 15:1-17
The Vine & The Branches

Review: What was John's overall purpose in writing? It was evangelistic (**20:30-31**). Arguably, his original readers were the unbelieving Jews of the diaspora. Today, as we discuss John 15:1-17, see if you can figure out how it contributes to John's purpose in writing

Big Picture: We are deep into John 13-17, all of which was spoken in just one night. John 1 → Introduction; 2-12 → Jesus in Public (3 years), 13-17 → Jesus in Private (1 night); 18-21 → Jesus Glorified (3 days).

Introduction: *What is a metaphor?* It is an illustrative comparison. Unlike a parable, it is not a story. It is literary device where one thing in real life is symbolically compared to something else that is different. **Example:** "You're a peach!" In John 15, Jesus taught by means of a vineyard metaphor.

****Every vineyard has vines, branches, fruit, and a vinedresser. How does this compare with Jesus and the disciples (15:1-11)?** In this metaphor, Jesus said that He is the vine, the Father is the vinedresser,[1] and the disciples are the branches.

The Big Idea: True believers are connected to Christ as branches in the true vine, and so bear much fruit.

15:1

Why do you suppose Jesus called Himself the "true" vine instead of just a vine (15:1); what's the contrast? In the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel was repeatedly compared to a vineyard that failed to produce good fruit, and thus fell under divine judgment (**Ps 80, Isa 5 & 27**). Thus, in contrast, Jesus declared Himself to be the true vine, the real deal, the fruitful fulfillment of what ancient Israel was supposed to picture.[2]

In John's Gospel, Jesus is presented as the true temple, the dwelling place of God with His people (**2:13-22**). Jesus gives living water that Jacob's well cannot give (**4:1-42**). Jesus is the new Moses who supplies God's people with true manna, bread that comes down from heaven to give life to all that eat of it (**6:32-58**). In **John 7**, Jesus fulfills and supersedes the Feast of Tabernacles. Thus, when Jesus said that He is the true vine, He meant that unlike faithless Israel, He is the ideal realization of all that God intended for His people.[3]

[1] "Vinedresser" (15:1), is from *georgos* (basis for George and Georgia); "farmer".
[2] Dennis & Grudem, *ESV Study*, 2054.
[3] Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 80: Fulfilling Your Purpose in Life (John 15:1-6)". Bible.org. Accessed 12/18/2024.

We wouldn't know Jesus said any of this unless John wrote it down. How did recording this vineyard metaphor advance John's goal of evangelizing unbelieving Jews? His Jewish readers would have been aware of comparisons in the Hebrew Scriptures of Israel to an unfruitful vineyard. John's inference is that his unbelieving Israelite readers are in danger of being cut off and burned in the fire because they are not plugged into the true vine.[4]

15:2

******According to 15:2, what two things does a vinedresser do to branches?** Fruitless branches are cut off; fruitful branches are pruned.

What does it mean to prune something (15:2)? To prune something means to cut back parts of it so that it will produce more fruit than otherwise. It is from *kathairo* ("catharsis"), literally "to cleanse." So, some branches are cut off, and others are cut back.

According to 15:2, what is the purpose of pruning? It is so that it will bear more fruit.

Example: Years ago, I planted blueberry bushes. I never did anything to them; yet the crop was acceptable. Recently, my wife wanted to experiment with pruning them. The result? The crop yield exploded!

Applications: Some people come to church every week, yet they produce no fruit. Why not? Because they are not true believers. The unmistakable mark of a true Christian is that **1)** he will undergo a pruning process, and **2)** he bears fruit.

ESV **Hebrews 12:8** If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

ESV **Hebrews 12: 11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness …

15:3

******What reassurance did Jesus give the disciples in 15:3?** He said that they were already "clean" (*kathros,* the noun form of the verb for prune, *kathairo*; this is a play on words). It means they were already among the healthy, fruitful branches. They had the life of the true vine pulsating through them, and didn't need to worry about being cut off![5]

[4] Carson, *John*, 516.
[5] Carson, *John,* 515.

15:4-5

****How could the disciples be sure to bear fruit (15:4-5)?** Just as a branch could only bear fruit if it remained connected to the vine, the disciples could only bear fruit by abiding in Jesus. They had to stay connected to Jesus.

Jesus said, "apart from me you can do nothing" (15:5). Lost people such as Elon Musk do amazing things all the time. In what sense can we do nothing? From context, it means nothing of eternal value, no fruit.

15:6

****According to 15:6, what will happen to anyone who fails to abide in Jesus?** Like the branch that does not bear fruit, it is cut off, withers, and is thrown into the fire.

Does 15:6 describe a fake believer or someone who once had salvation but then lost it? How so? Comparing **6:37-40** and **10:27-30**, it is evident that no true believer can end up cut off and cast into the fire.

ESV **John 6:39** … this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose <u>nothing</u> of all that he has given me …

ESV **John 10:27-29** My sheep hear my voice…. I give them <u>eternal</u> life, and they will <u>never</u> perish, and <u>no one</u> will snatch them out of my hand…. and <u>no one</u> is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Eternal Life: "Eternal life is not something you get when you die; it's something you get when you believe."[6] If you have eternal life for ten years but then lose it, you didn't really have eternal life; you only had ten-year life. Eternal life is eternal.

Example: Judas, from all outward appearances was a true disciple, but in reality never belonged to Jesus. Jesus' statement that these unfruitful branches are "in me" is simply a statement to make the story of the vine "work".

ESV **Matthew 7:21** Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven …

15:7

****Based on 15:7, what two conditions are given for answered prayer? 1)** You must abide in Jesus, and **2)** His words must abide in you. This verse contains a very significant "if". Those who meet the required conditions will simply not ask for some things. Instead, you will desire what Jesus desires. The main idea is that we should be in constant communication with God, and see our prayers answered on a regular basis.

[6] Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 334.

Prayer Perspective: Jesus' prayer promise is not easy to understand, even if we limit our prayer requests to His kingdom purposes. For example, *Have you ever prayed for the salvation of someone who died without Christ? Ever prayed for healing of a marriage that ended in divorce anyway? Ever prayed for restoration of a believer who is sinning, but who never came back to Christ?* Keep in mind that we do not always see things as God sees them, that things happen we won't know about until eternity.[7]

15:8

****The famous Westminster Catechism states that man's chief and highest end is to <u>glorify</u> God. In 15:8, what glorifies the Father and proves that you are a disciple?** Bearing much fruit glorifies the Father and proves a person to be a disciple.

Example: If you see a tree loaded with pecans, you'd be right in thinking that it was a pecan tree. If you see a tree covered with walnuts, you'd be right in thinking it to be a walnut tree. A tree can be identified by its fruit. Similarly, a person should be able to look at the fruit in a Christian's life and should know by that fruit that he follows Jesus.

Application: We rightly sing songs to glorify God, but bearing much fruit also glorifies Him. Francis Scott Key wrote the "Star Spangled Banner" in 1814. Five years later, he wrote a hymn called "Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise Thee"; one of the lines reads, "Since words can never measure, let my life show forth Thy praise."[8]

15:9

****What command is there in 15:9?** The command is to abide in Jesus' love.

15:10

****How can a person abide in Jesus' love (15:10)?** It is by keeping Jesus' commandments. The abiding relationship also implies dependence on Christ.

What example did Jesus give in 15:10 of abiding in love? The example was how Jesus kept the Father's commandments and abode in the Father's love.

15:11

****According to 15:11, why did Jesus tell them these things?** It was so that His joy would be in them, and that their joy would be full.

Whose joy would they have (15:11)? It's not <u>your</u> joy; it is Jesus' joy in you! It is not joy <u>like</u> His; it is His joy. So, we certainly have it within us to be joyful. Joy of Jesus is abundant. Notice that there is a lot of it: "full." When Jesus spoke these things, He was facing dark Gethsemane and bloody Calvary, yet He had joy:

[7] Cole, "Lesson 81: Growing Closer to Christ (John 15:7-11)". Bible.org. Accessed December 21, 2024.
[8] Francis Scott Key, "Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise Thee", 1819.

ESV **Hebrews 12:1-2** … let us … lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame …

How would you define the word "joy" (15:11)? BAGD simply defines it as to "be glad."[9] It is from *chara*; which you can hear sounds like the word for grace, *charis*; *chara* and *charis* come from the same Greek stem. It is only because of God's grace that we can experience joy.

Joy can be a lot like happiness, but there is a difference. The problem with happiness is that it is based on happenstance (outward circumstances). We feel happy when we get a new car, or a pay raise, or our kids do well in school, or we spend a day in the mountains. If your hap is good, you're glad. However, if your hap is bad, you're sad. So, if you are dependent on happiness, it makes you a victim of circumstances.

However, the New Testament often takes a secular word and gives it somewhat of a specialized meaning. This is certainly the case with the word "joy."

Joy is:
—the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life,
—the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and
—the determined choice to praise God in every situation.[10]

What's the difference between having joy and having "full" joy (15:11)? Perhaps it is a matter of degree.

Witness: Having joy is a powerful witness. That's where the reality of your faith shows forth. What's down in the well comes up in the bucket. Some joyless Christians go around like advance agents for the undertaker. It is as if they have a Bible under one arm and a tombstone under the other. They ask, "Wouldn't you like to believe in Jesus?" People will say, "No thank you; I've got enough troubles already."[11]

From the context, how can someone have full joy (15:11)? He can have full joy by abiding in Jesus' love by keeping His commandments, 15:10.

Application: Ours is not to be a grudging obedience; it is all about joy!

Application: *What word pops into your mind when I say, 'obedience'?" Duty? Drudgery? Rules? No fun? What about, "joy"? What about "fullness of joy"?* Jesus associated obedience with our experiencing full joy in Him. If you don't associate obedience and fullness of joy, maybe you need to change your thinking![12]

[9] Bauer, *Lexicon*, 873.
[10] Definition by Rick Warren. Bill High, "How Do You Define Joy?", BillHigh.com. Accessed 09/11/2019.
[11] Sermon illustration by Adrian Rogers.
[12] Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 81: Growing Closer to Christ (John 15:7-11)", Bible.org. Accessed 12/18/2024.

****How many times did Jesus command them to love one another (15:12-17)?** Jesus commanded them to love each other twice (**15:12, 17**).

ESV **1 John 4:20-21** If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; … this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

15:12

****According to 15:12-13, what standard did Jesus give them for how were they to love each other?** They were to love each other "as I have loved you" — an extremely high standard! They didn't know it at the time, but He loved so much that He was planning to lay down His life for them.

ESV **1 John 3:16** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Examples: Every church has weird people in it. How do you handle such folks? Do you leave the church, or avoid that person, or pretend he doesn't exist? "I don't like him, he talks too loud. I'll never go to a church that guy belongs to; he talks too much. I stay away from her; she's too pushy and controlling. That' guys a nut; he stupid. She irritates me. He's an odd duck; really weird."

15:14-15

****In 15:14-15, who did Jesus consider to be His friends?** Those who do what he commanded are Jesus' friends. Jesus is Jehovah God in human form, the God-man. He created us and is worthy of our worship. Yet, He called them "friends"! Even though Jesus was in a position to "command" them to do things, He considered them as friends.

According to 15:15, why did Jesus no longer call them "servants"? A servant only knows what he is told to do (not why he is told to do it, or what the overall plan is). However, Jesus told them what He, their master, was doing. He also told them everything He had heard from the Father. **Example:** A leading character in a TV series gave an interview. While filming the third season, she was called into the producer's office and was shocked to learn that in the next episode her character would be killed off. She said she burst into tears. The producer treater her as a servant, not as a friend; he didn't tell her his plans.

Interesting: We are said to be God's friends, but God is never said to be our friend. Friendship with Jesus not reciprocal. **Why is it important to keep this in mind?** He's still our God. Ours is not a buddy-buddy relationship. To say such would be to demean God.[13] And, He is still in a position to give us commands.

[13] Carson, *John*, 522.

15:16

****What did Jesus appoint the disciples to do (15:16)?** He appointed them to bear fruit that abides.

In 15:16, why did Jesus point out that it was not they who chose Him, but rather He who chose them? How does that statement fit into the flow of what's being said? It was an honor and privilege to be among the few chosen by the Messiah. The disciples thus had a commission to fulfill: to bear lasting fruit. Such a statement would also keep them from being puffed up with pride over being called the friends of Jesus.[14]

What does it mean to have fruit that abides (15:16)? The NIV renders this as "fruit that will last."

ESV **Psalm 1:3** He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

What did Jesus' promise to those who have abiding fruit (15:16)? He said that whatever is asked of the Father it will be given. This is similar to what Jesus said in **15:7,** and in **14:13-14.** Maybe the prayer request that is answered is that we would bear fruit that abides.

Why do you think this promise of answered prayer was given (15:16)?

15:17

Lest they miss the point, what command was repeated in 15:17? The command is to love one another. This must be important!

So What?

What salvation warning does this passage contain?

ESV **Romans 11:22** Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

Taking this entire section (15:1-17) into account, what is the fruit we are supposed to bear? This includes such fruit as obedience to Jesus' commands, having the joy of Jesus, and love for one another.[15] Since love, and joy are the first two fruits of the Spirit, perhaps we can extend the list to include the other fruits:

[14] Carson, *John*, 523.
[15] Carson, *John*, 517.

ESV **Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control …

Adrian Rogers: "God prefers the fruits of the Spirit over spiritual nuts."[16]

**** = Ask this question before reading the text to engage people's minds and focus their attention.

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[16] Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 93