

I Am the true vine

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[0 : 0 0] How many followers of Jesus do you think there are in the world today? At a guess, how many would you say? Well, according to the most recent figures, which have been published by Operation World in their book, the figures, and these are their statistics, are there are 546 million people. That's about 10% of the world's population are active disciples of Jesus Christ. It's staggering.

The growth has been amazing. In China, over 10,000 people repent and turn to Christ every single day.

In Kenya, almost 50% of the population are committed followers of Jesus. The highest rate of growth in the world today, not with the highest number, but the highest rate of growth is in Iran and Afghanistan, where persecution is at its worst. But it's not just other parts of the world. Ireland has also seen growth. 70,000 people, that's about 1% of the population, have turned to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. It's incredible. Now, why is this? Well, it's all because of Jesus' promise to his disciples over 2,000 years ago. Listen to this promise. It's in verse 16. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. That promise has been taking effect ever since, as disciples of Jesus around the world have taken his word seriously.

Now in John's Gospel chapters 13 to 17, we have what commentators call the last discourse. It's the last few days of Jesus before his death, which he spends with his disciples. They chat, they have meals together.

It's a very intimate and close time. It's just Jesus and his disciples. And throughout, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his going back to the Father. But as Jesus is going back to the Father, so he sends his people out. As Jesus leaves the world, the disciples begin to move out into the world. We see this at the very beginning and the end of this section. So in chapter 13, verse 20, Jesus says, I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.

[3 : 1 1] And we see the same in chapter 17, verse 18. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

So there's this movement taking place. Jesus going, Jesus leaving, but the disciples going and being sent. And in chapter 15, at the very centre of this conversation, Jesus makes it crystal clear.

Chapter 15, verse 8. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. Jesus sends out his church to be fruitful. That people within our communities and all around the world would believe and trust in Christ.

That's the fruit that Jesus is looking for. And that's the fruit that he has promised. People who will follow him. Now to help us understand what Jesus is saying, he uses three horticultural metaphors to explain it all.

The first is the vine. In verse 1. I am the true vine. Jesus is the vine. That's the first metaphor. Then also in verse 1. We have the gardener. I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

[4 : 4 0] So Jesus the vine, the Father, the gardener. And then down at verse 5. I am the vine, says Jesus, and you are the branches. The church are the branches in the vine.

Now we're going to look at these three metaphors and see how we can go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last. First then, the vine, which is all about expanding mission.

Jesus identifies himself very clearly as being the vine. Look at verse 1. I am the true vine. And verse 5. I am the vine.

Now when we think of vine, don't think wine and all types of grapes. Think mission. Vine equals mission.

To see this, have a look back at Isaiah chapter 5. Isaiah chapter 5, starting at verse 1.

[5 : 43] This is a picture of a vineyard. I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest of vines. Well, who is this vine? Well, we're told down at verse 7.

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel and the people of Judah. So the vineyard is God's people.

And what's the purpose of this vine? Well, go back up to the rest of verse 2. He built a watchtower around it. Cut out a winepress as well.

Then he looked for a good crop of grapes. But it yielded only bad fruit. God had rescued Israel from Egypt, from their slavery.

[6 : 44] He had taken them out of there. And now he had planted them amongst the nations in a new land, a fertile land. So as to bring his salvation to others.

They would be the means of bringing others, other nations, other peoples into that relationship with God. But they brought only bad fruit.

Look at the end of verse 7. He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed. He looked for righteousness, but he heard cries of distress.

And in response, God judged the vine. Look at verse 4. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?

When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed.

[7 : 44] I will break down its walls and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland neither pruned nor cultivated. And briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.

A judgment of God upon his people. Because they fail to be the fruit-bearing vine that he had called them to be. Now it seems from this that the vine, the vineyard, has been a failure.

But God doesn't give up on his promise to reach the nations and bring his salvation. Flick on to Isaiah chapter 27. Because here we see a further promise.

We could go to many different places, but this one I think helps sum it up. Isaiah 27 verse 2. Here is a promise of restoration. In that day, verse 2, sing about a fruitful vineyard.

I, the Lord, watch over it. I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it. And verse 6.

[8 : 57] In days to come, Jacob, that's the people of Israel, will take root. Israel, my people, will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit.

It's a wonderful picture of this vineyard spreading out its branches into all the world so that it bears fruit.

Now that promise became a reality with the coming of Jesus. Jesus said, I am the true vine.

Jesus came as the true vine sent by God and planted in the world. He came to replace or fulfill what Israel were meant to be.

Now when we say Jesus has replaced Israel, it's not more of the same. It's completely different. Jesus is everything that Israel were not.

[10 : 04] Israel had been sent into the nations. They were planted there. They were to be a blessing to the others. But they had failed. Rather than lead people to God, they turned people away from God.

And in contrast, Jesus the vine was sent into the world. Jesus came to die for us. And through his death, the way is now open for people from every race and every culture and every background, whoever they are, to receive the blessings of God, to receive forgiveness for all of their sin, to find peace with God and the hope of eternity with him.

So Jesus comes as the true vine planted in the world, welcoming all who will come to him to find the new and eternal life.

Jesus as the true vine comes into the world and he expands the mission of God out to the world and to the nations. So that is the true vine, the first metaphor.

The second metaphor is of the gardener working among the vine. We can picture the gardener coming along, walking down through the vineyard and cutting and snipping away.

[11 : 26] That's what we have in verse 2. The Father cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

Now can you see how all of this relates to us? Remember in verse 5 it says, We are the branches. The Father is the gardener, walking amongst his people.

He's working in us. And it seems he has two roles, which is all about producing more fruit.

First he is a negative one. He cuts off. Look at verse 2 again. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.

If we want to see growth and we want to see fruit, then all the useless parts must be cut off and cleared away. Any gardener will tell you that.

[12 : 28] In winter and in spring all the dead branches, the ones without any life, are simply cut away, gathered, taken off, and then thrown away. The image is repeated for us in verse 6.

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. Now it's quite a stark picture, but it's a very clear picture of what God will do with those who claim to be followers of Jesus, but are actually not.

Now within this context here, the obvious example is Judas. Look back at chapter 13. He claimed to be a follower of Jesus.

Chapter 13, verse 20. I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me. Down to verse 26.

[13 : 39] Jesus answered, It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish. Then dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.

As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. What you are about to do, do quickly, Jesus told him. You see, Judas looked like a believer.

He had been with Jesus for the last few years. He had been with the rest of the disciples. He read his Bible. He went to church like the rest of them. He did all kinds of good things. And they all thought he was a true disciple.

But God knew his true heart. It was like he was cut away from the vine. Now this, of course, raises a very big question for us.

Which is simply this. Can people who say they are Christians fall away from God? Can I be a Christian this year and then next year not be a Christian? Well, this cutting off is not meant to cause us doubt.

[14 : 47] Remember what Jesus has already said back in chapter 10 verse 20 Sorry, John chapter 10 verse 28 Jesus says, I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.

No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

You see there, it's quite clear, isn't it? Jesus gives eternal life and he will keep those who he gives eternal life to.

Nobody can take them away. They can't fall away. He will keep them. So the purpose of John chapter 15 is not to cause us doubt and wonder, I wonder if I'm going to fall away as a Christian.

But to remind us that all true disciples bear fruit. You can't be a disciple, you can't claim to be a disciple and not bear fruit.

[16 : 02] It's two sides of the one coin. Disciple and fruit. You can't have one without the other. As it says in 15 verse 8 This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples.

So if you have trusted Christ and you are following him the promise is people will come to Christ people will trust Christ because of you.

We'll come back to that in a little while. But that's the first rule. He cuts away. It's a negative one.

Then there's a positive one. Look at the rest of verse 2. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit and while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

Now being fruitful is not about perfection. He doesn't call us to be perfect. It's about pruning. And again the imagery is striking.

[17 : 09] Where the gardener sees life where he sees bunches of grapes where he sees a lot happening he works on it even more. He cuts it back.

He snips away all the bits that are no good. He cuts it back so that it will be more fruitful. But notice how he does it.

Verse 3. You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. The word of Christ has already cleaned the disciples.

We'll come back to that in a minute. But that's what the word does. It cleans us. The gospel has taken effect in their lives. But it doesn't stop there. God's word also has a pruning effect in our lives.

We see this in chapter 17 verse 17. John 17 verse 17 it says sanctify them.

[18 : 08] That word means to make holy to set apart to purify. So he says sanctify them by the truth.

Your word is truth. You see God's word not just cleans us and makes it right with God but it goes on working in us cleaning us pruning us purifying us.

God's word works in our life taking away the bits that are useless the bits that are no good so that we become more like Christ so that we become more fruitful. So if we want to see more fruit in our lives if we want to see more people come to Christ then we must be people who take God's word seriously.

It's not just something we turn to in a time of trouble or just on a Sunday. It's got to be part of our appetite part of our diet every day. of course pruning is painful isn't it?

If you could ask a branch what it's like when they get cut it's painful and so it is when God's word takes effect in our life nobody likes the spirit of God showing us through his word the areas of our lives that need cleaned up and cut off.

[19 : 35] It's not nice to be shown things that are wrong and how we should be but as the word of God takes effect in our lives the positive is that he is changing us and transforming us so that we can become more fruitful.

So the father comes as the gardener walking amongst his vine walking amongst his people cutting off those who do not bear fruit because they are not true disciples.

and pruning those who are fruitful so that they can be even more fruitful. So we have the vine we have the gardener and the last metaphor is that of the branches.

Look at verse 5 Jesus says I am the vine and you are the branches. Now while the branches are important they must be seen in relation to the vine.

they're connected and first we must see that we the branches are connected through Christ. Jesus as we've seen is the true vine.

[20 : 49] He has replaced the old. So it's our response to Jesus that determines whether we are actually connected to the vine. We have to ask that question am I in the vine or am I not?

What's my response to Jesus? And how can I be in the vine? Well look at verse 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

It's the word of God that cleans us that makes us acceptable to God that makes us part of the vine. Let's have a look at this in more detail go back to chapter 13 verse 6 You see this whole section 13 to 17 is all intertwined chapter 13 verse 6 This is at the Passover meal and they're just about to sit down and have dinner together and as was custom after their walk and their dirty feet they would be washed.

So Jesus came verse 6 to Simon Peter who said to him Lord are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied You do not realise now what I am doing but later you will understand.

No said Peter you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered Unless I wash you you have no part with me. Then Lord Simon Peter replied not just my feet and my hands but my head as well.

[22 : 26] Jesus answered A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet his whole body is clean. Of course Jesus didn't mean here a physical cleaning.

As he said it wasn't about having a bath or a shower. He was talking about being spiritually clean. And the cleaning that Jesus would do would happen when he goes to the cross where he would clean them of their sin.

He would take their sin, their failure upon himself and he would take the blame for that. And through trust in him we could be clean. So it's how we respond to Jesus and his death for us that determines whether we are connected to Christ.

Those who trust Christ, those who look to him for that cleaning, that inner cleaning, are connected to the vine. They become the branches.

They are like grafted in. So we are connected through Christ. Now the purpose of being connected to the vine is fruitfulness.

[23 : 43] So the question we need to ask is, well how can we be fruitful if we're branches in the vine how can we bring about fruit? Well fruit bearing is ultimately the responsibility and work of Jesus.

It's not us. Look at verse 4 chapter 15. Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him, you will bear much fruit.

apart from me you can do nothing. Now we don't need to know anything about gardening to get the point here. A branch that is connected to the vine will be fruitful, but a branch that is disconnected will be fruitless.

Look what it says in verse 4. No branch can bear fruit by itself. End of verse 5. Apart from me you can do nothing. vine. In other words, it's the vine that produces the fruit.

[24 : 53] That's where the life comes from. It comes from the vine, from the main part. The source of life is Christ. He is the one who brings salvation into people's lives.

It flows out through the branches to others, but it comes from Christ. So is that it? What do we do? If Christ is the one who does it all, what do I do?

Well, again, we can't miss the point in these verses. Look at verse 4. It says, remain in me. Remain in the vine. It's repeated over and over.

It's vital that we remain close and intimate in our relationship with Christ. And how do we do that? Well, we have a clue, don't we, in verse 7.

if you remain in me and my words remain in you. You see, there's the clue to remaining in Christ is connected with remaining or being dependent upon his word.

[25 : 59] If you like, God's word is the nutrients, the fertilizer that will cause us to grow and be fruitful. Just like a gardener will put down all kinds of compost to make his garden grow, so the word is the nutrients that will help us to grow.

And so if we remain, if we stay close to Christ, if we are taking him, absorbing him, we will bear fruit. In fact, there's a promise.

If we're remaining in Christ, we can pray to God for people to come to Christ. Look at verse 7. If you remain in me, and my words remain in me, you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

The whatever you wish here doesn't mean, well, I can ask for a car or for a new job. We can ask for those things, but it's not guaranteed. He's not saying, you know, whatever you like. No, the whatever you wish has to be related to the fruit that Jesus has promised.

In prayer, we ask God to work through us so that people will come to Christ. it's the same in verse 16, where he tells them to go and bear fruit, fruitful last. That will last.

[27 : 13] Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. It's about fruit. That's the promise. Ask him to work in people's lives, and God will do it.

The church around the world has seen huge growth. We saw that at the beginning from just a few people who are following him.

At his death, they all deserted. Whereas today, 546 million people around the world, such huge growth.

Disciples are and have been through the centuries bearing fruit as he promised. But as encouraging as that is, over 60% of the world's population has never been introduced to Jesus Christ.

Not that they've heard and not responded. They have never been introduced. They don't know anything about him. In Ireland, while thousands have turned to Christ, we can say that millions have not yet turned to Christ.

[28 : 37] And closer to home, we have friends, don't we? People within our family who are not yet disciples and followers of Jesus. What's going to happen?

Well, we have been sent by Jesus. We have been planted out into the community. We are the branches that are spreading out into the vine in all the different places where we are, our work, our neighbourhoods, the families where we are.

We are branching out. We have a purpose where we have been sent. And with that purpose comes a promise. It's not a mistake where each one of us are planted.

And here's the promise, verse 16, you did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

That's the promise that each one of us has wherever we are. This is ultimately God's mission. this is his work. But yet he works through people like you and me with all our ups and downs and our failures and all our difficulties.

[29 : 58] And he will work through us to bring about that fruit. But yet he calls us to remain in him, to stay close to him, to follow him, to obey him, to absorb through our roots the very nutrients, the words of God, so that we become more like Christ, so that more fruit will come.

We mightn't see it for ourselves. We might not even see it in our own lifetime. That's the way God works at times.

But the promise remains true. I chose you, I appointed you, I've cleaned you, I'm pruning you, to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

So let's go, let's be sent, and as we go, be full of confidence that we will bear fruit, fruit that will last.

well, and as we're ■ and so are Thank you.