

The Gardener & The True Vine

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Date: 23 October 2022

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[0 : 00] Just a reminder for the kids, we do have clipboards at the back if you're looking for something to keep busy with. And there's some coloring pages and things there, activity sheets for you guys.

So feel free to grab those if you'd like. And we're continuing on again this morning with our journey through the Gospel of John. And today, we come to a bit of a shift in the story.

Up until now, Jesus has been with his disciples in the upper room. They ate the Passover meal there. They've been talking with Jesus. Well, mostly Jesus has been talking to them.

But now as the evening progresses, Jesus and his disciples leave that place. We see this in John 14, verse 31. Jesus says, come now, let us leave.

Probably our first question is, where are they going? Interestingly, John doesn't tell us. And if we just kind of skim through the next two chapters, it looks like the conversation between Jesus and his disciples just keeps on going.

[1 : 03] And again, it is mostly Jesus doing the talking. And then we get to chapter 17, and Jesus begins a lengthy prayer. And then finally, we come to the first verse of chapter 18, and it says this.

When Jesus had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side, there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

And if you keep reading, that's the Garden of Gethsemane. So there's been a lot of speculation and debate about where Jesus goes with his disciples after leaving the upper room.

Some have suggested that perhaps they got up and were intending to go, but like sometimes some of you have experienced, the conversation just keeps on going and going and going.

And before you know it, chapter 17 is over, and then they leave. Others suggest that they actually do leave the house, and that chapters 15 and 16 are the words of Jesus with his disciples as they walk through the city streets of Jerusalem.

[2 : 09] Some have suggested that maybe they end up at the temple, and that Jesus does the high priestly prayer of chapter 17 at the temple. And finally, some suggest that John is just telling the story a little out of order, that he's trying to bring together all the things that night that were related and of the same theme, and bring them together.

And so a few parts of the conversation are out of order. I tend to think that Jesus and his disciples really did leave the upper room when Jesus said, Come now, let us leave, at the end of chapter 14. And wherever the words of chapters 15 to 17 were said, chapter 18 seems to make it clear that they must have been said before they crossed the Kidron Valley and went to the garden.

Now, I'll admit, it does seem a little unlikely that Jesus could be walking through the narrow streets of Jerusalem with 11 men and having the kind of conversation and teaching that we see in 15 and 16 at the same time.

Perhaps there was another spot where they stopped and lingered on the way. Maybe the place that this conversation happens, we don't know for sure, but maybe it was a vineyard on the outskirts of the city.

[3 : 32] Jesus often taught using metaphors and analogies that were based off of the stuff that was right there in front of them. And this next chapter, chapter 15, is an extended teaching analogy borrowed from the vineyard.

So let's read what Jesus says here in John chapter 15. He says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

He 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.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me as I also 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.

[4 : 44] I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

And Jesus goes on, but we're going to stop and linger over these first few verses today. I find it difficult even to know where to start with these words of Jesus.

The whole chapter is one of the most pregnant and precious portions of Scripture in the Bible. Many Christians have memorized the first eight verses of this chapter in an effort to meditate on all that's here.

And we go to all this effort because we recognize that there's something here that's just so critical, so foundational, so profound, so powerful, that if we can get these words of Jesus deep into our hearts, we just know that it'll change the rest of our lives.

[5 : 57] So we don't want to rush past this. I'm planning to spend a few weeks on these verses.

Today is just going to be part one of several. We want to really take time to think about what Jesus is saying here.

Jesus begins by setting up the analogy, the metaphor. He says, I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener.

So picture in your mind a garden. If you've been to a vineyard, you can picture that, but many of us may not have. So in that case, just picture a garden, maybe with a cherry tomato plant growing in it. There's some similarities. They're not identical, I know, but similar enough. See that plant growing there in your mind. It's got the main shoot coming out of the ground, the vine, and then off of the main shoot, it has branches.

Some of those branches have grapes or tomatoes hanging on them, and others do not. Jesus tells the men there with him, verse 5, I am the vine, the main shoot, you are the branches, those secondary shoots coming off.

[7 : 23] And he says, my father is the gardener. And the gardener, notice, is not absent like in another parable where a man buys a vineyard and then kind of leaves it to some tenants.

No, Jesus tells us here that the gardener is present. He's active. Verse 2. What is he doing? He is tending to the vine that he has planted in his vineyard.

He's seeing that some of the branches are not producing fruit, and he's cutting them off. And then he's seeing that there's some that are producing fruit, but maybe not as much as they could be.

And so he is pruning them. Those branches are putting energy into other shoots and leaves that are not necessary. And so he prunes those unnecessary shoots and leaves from that particular branch so that all of the plant's resources go into the formation of fruit so that it produces not just a little bit of fruit, but a lot of fruit.

Now, I've really just started to get into gardening myself this past year. And Jen and I, we learned a few things this year. We found this variety of tomato plant called Sweet Millions.

[8 : 52] And, you know, when I was growing up, we had a variety called Sweet 100s. Maybe you've heard of that one. We had that planted in our garden back home. And it was a big plant that grew huge amounts of these delicious little cherry tomatoes.

And we loved that as kids. So when Jen and I ran across this award-winning variety called Sweet Millions, we thought, oh, yeah. We were so excited. That's exactly what we want.

We don't want just hundreds of cherry tomatoes. We want millions of them. We'll be able to snack on them all summer long. We could put them in salads. We can give all the extras away.

There's only one problem. We didn't start the seeds indoors early enough to get the full harvest that we had hoped for. But we learned this one thing for sure.

Every gardener desires as much fruit as possible. That's why we plant the plant in the first place.

And then we go to all that work and time to check on that plant and water it and make sure it's healthy and doing well.

[10 : 01] We go to all that work and we spend all that time and put in all that effort because we want a return for our investment. How disappointing to go to all that work and find next to nothing at

harvest time.

That's how it felt for our parsnips. The picture on the seed package showed these huge fat parsnips and we planted quite a number of them. It took forever for them to sprout and after all that work of watering them we ended up with about a dozen gangly little white carrot things to show for it. I share this to highlight the reason that the gardener plants and does all that work is for the fruit. It's for the fruit.

Think of that juicy tomato being sliced on your kitchen cutting board or that cucumber. Think of that fresh garden carrot and the smile that it puts on your face when you crunch into it.

That sweet, earthy flavor in your mouth. eating fruit is one of the delights of life here on earth.

There's so much variety there's so many different ways to serve and prepare them.

[11 : 17] Jams and spreads sliced fresh on a sandwich or in a veggie platter sauces and sautés medleys and salads pies and desserts fruit is so good.

It's a delight in this world. And so we must come to terms with the mindset of the gardener. It's good.

It's right for the gardener to tend that plant in a way that causes it to produce lots of fruit. It's good and it's right for the gardener to try to maximize the delight and enjoyment and benefit that's going to come from each branch of that plant.

We have to come to terms with the heart and the mindset of the gardener and the gardener says Jesus is God my father.

He's the one working to bring maximum fruit maximum good maximum benefit maximum delight and enjoyment from each branch of the plant.

[12 : 33] And the plant the vine is Jesus and we who believe in Jesus and belong to him are the branches. As we consider the mindset of God the gardener we really have to go back a little bit and think about how things have been going between God and his people up until this point in the story.

In fact this isn't the first time that God has spoken in terms of gardening and even vineyards about his relationship with the people.

Consider the words of Psalm 80. It's kind of a prayer. Restore us God almighty make your face shine on us that we may be saved.

You transplanted a vine from Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it and it took root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with its shade the mighty cedars with its branches its branches reached as far as the sea its shoots as far as the river.

[13 : 49] Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it and insects from the fields feed on it. Return to us God almighty look down from heaven and see watch over this vine the root your right hand has planted the son you have raised up for yourself your vine is cut down it is burned with fire at your rebuke your people perish let your hand rest on the man at your right hand the son of man you have raised up for yourself then we will not turn away from you revive us and we will call on your name restore us Lord God almighty make your face shine on us that we may be saved in this psalm Israel is likened to a vine that God planted a vine that grew tall and strong and was very fruitful but then as the story goes

God turned against this vine in judgment cutting it down breaking down the wall of the vineyard so that the surrounding nations could plunder its fruit consider also the words of Isaiah from chapter 5 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 he built a watchtower in it and cut out a wine press as well then he looked for a crop of good grapes but it yielded only bad fruit now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah judge between me and my vineyard what more could I have could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it when I look for good grapes why did it yield only bad now I will tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard

I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed I will break down its wall 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 the vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in and he looked for justice but saw bloodshed for righteousness but heard cries of distress in this song of the prophet Isaiah he invites the people of Israel to consider how God feels about them God is the one who has worked to create this vineyard

the nation of Israel he's the one who's planted and tended to these vines in the vineyard the people of Judah and God describes how he's gone to great lengths for his vineyard he prepared the soil he cleared the stones he planted it with the best of the best built a watchtower in it cut a winepress out and this song is like an allegory think of it how did

Israel get its start God started with Abraham the man of great faith and Isaac his son and Jacob the choicest of vines they were all men of faith and God planted them in the land and he purified them and grew them and increased they increased in number when they went down to Egypt and God purified them some more and taught them and led them as they were in the wilderness and then he transplanted them into the land of Israel before that it had been a land full of wickedness God cleared the stones he cleaned house in the land of Canaan and he brought his chosen vines and planted them there giving them everything they needed to grow strong and healthy and produce all kinds of good fruit they were to be a nation characterized by righteousness and justice a light to the whole world displaying the glory of their

God then God looked for a crop of good grapes he waited patiently like a gardener waits for the flowers and then the fruit and what was the result century after century after century bad fruit bloodshed greed oppression idolatry covetousness sexual impurity and unfaithfulness deceitfulness theft disloyalty faithlessness lies slander and on and on and on it went until finally the Lord did what needed to be done and destroyed his vineyard if you know the story from the scriptures he brought the Assyrians and the

[19 : 31] Babylonians against Israel and laid waste his land the survivors went into exile and were scattered through these empires and no longer was Israel a nation like it had been but because God is merciful that was not the end of Israel's story God spoke again through Isaiah long ago about a time when Israel would be a fruitful vineyard Isaiah chapter 27 verse 2 in that day 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 I am not angry if only there were briars and thorns confronting me I would march against them in battle I would set them all on fire or else let them come to me for refuge let them make peace with me yes let them make peace with me in days to come

Jacob will take root Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit fruit because God is merciful and gracious he promised to bring about what he was looking for a fruitful vineyard a people budding and blossoming and filling the whole world with fruit how can this be how will this happen well this brings us to John 15 God will bring this about by planting the true vine in his vineyard I am the true vine says Jesus think about those words the vines planted long ago by God into his vineyard were the best of the best men of great faith yet they were still sinners and so were their offspring this is where all the bad fruit that we see in the story of

Israel came from try as they may they were all sinful men and sinful women with hearts bent on turning away from God a world full of good fruit will not come from that vine something needed to be done by God by the gardener to make Israel a fruitful vineyard full of that good fruit which will fill the whole world and so God planted his son Jesus the true vine into his vineyard the very source of life and all that is good he had to come and be planted right there in the land of Israel and so by the time we come to John chapter 15 we see that God the gardener is again at work and this time it's not a message of judgment it's not a rebuke for wickedness this time the working of

God will result in a fruitful vineyard in much blessing for the world and much glory for God because at the center of this garden this vineyard is the true vine Jesus with Jesus and through Jesus all that God longs for as gardener will come to pass an abundance of good fruit kindness love faithfulness generosity justice compassion honesty holiness joy reconciliation peace honor steadfastness and much more there's a massive contrast here think about this the difference in the fruit where does it come from how come it's not going to be a repeat of what happened in the past when God looked and there was only bad fruit because it's the true vine that has been planted now in the vineyard fruit and this vine

Jesus makes all the difference in the fruit all of these good things come not because we're such good branches but because we are branches enjoined to the true vine Jesus so this sets the stage here for us there is a good and wonderful gardener God and he has now planted in his garden the true vine Jesus and you says Jesus to the eleven men with him you are the branches think about this what is a branch it's a secondary shoot that's coming off the main shoot that's how Jesus describes these eleven men his followers you are secondary shoots coming off of me the main shoot the true vine now there's a big difference between secondary shoots and main shoots isn't

there you can't just cut off one of those secondary shoots on your tomato plant and pop it in some soil and start watering it and expect that it's going to grow that lots of good fruit is going to come from it it doesn't work like that you'll come back in a few days and you'll find that branch is wilted into mush and is deader than a doornail the main shoot of the plant is the source of life for all the branches for all those secondary shoots without the main shoot the branches are dead think about that nice tree in your yard if you have one do you care if a branch or two gets broken off here and there not really except that but a few branches here and there no big deal they grow back with time but if the whole tree trunk starts to look diseased and begins rotting well that's a problem and every branch will be affected the main shoot is primary it's the source of life and the branches they're secondary they're dependent on the main shoot you know as I was thinking about this this week [26 : 31] I just started wondering do we sometimes just get this backwards do we see ourselves as the main shoot and Jesus as a secondary branch in our life maybe a really important one on which a lot hangs but I'm the main shoot and he's just a branch in my life I want to challenge you to ask yourself this question is that how I've been living does it all center really around me and yeah Jesus is a part of my life and if so is it possible that that's why maybe things aren't going well or maybe aren't working because I've got this backwards I'm seeing myself and my life as the main thing and Jesus is kind of the secondary thing something to think about

Jesus really drives this home in verses four to six just how dependent we are on him he says remain in me as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you you will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing if you do not remain in me you're like a branch that is thrown away and withers such branches are picked up thrown into the fire and burned so God the gardener is looking for good fruit but says Jesus unless you stay connected to the main shoot to

Jesus you won't be bearing any fruit for God all of that good stuff that I mentioned earlier that God wants to see come from our lives it's not going to come in your life unless you remain in Jesus unless you stay connected to him in close relationship with him Jesus says it again in verse 5 and he states it very strongly here he says apart from me you can do nothing let those words sink in all the good fruit it will not come apart from Jesus try as we may because he is the source of all life and of everything that is good without him you'll be left to repeat the story of Israel back in the Old Testament to try and be your own vine and what is going to come bad fruit bad fruit bad fruit this is so critical that

Jesus even says it again a third time in verse six he says if you do not remain in me you're like a branch that is thrown away and withers your very life depends on staying closely connected to Jesus the true vine your relationship with Jesus is critical it's of the utmost importance if you go away from him you'll be as a dead branch lying there on the ground by itself you'll wither such branches says Jesus aren't good for anything except kindling a fire says Jesus and so Jesus urges his disciples and us again and again and again here with this simple word remain in me remain in me stay in me stay connected to me stay in relationship with me

I am the vine don't think that you can do this on your own you can't I am the vine says Jesus you're just a branch remain in me abide in me and there's a promise if you do if you do you will bear much fruit it's a certain thing so I'm going to just recap a little and then leave you with a question to think about this morning first God the father is the gardener we need to come to terms with his mindset and his purpose he is at work tending and pruning to bring forth the people whose lives will be full of good fruit so much that it fills the whole world second God could not bring this about through even the best of fallen mankind and so

[31 : 58] God planted the true vine Jesus into his vineyard and through Jesus all the good things that God desires from his people will come to fruition and third those good things will come to pass in us only if we remain in him if we stay closely connected to Jesus walking closely in relationship with him and so my simple question I want to leave you with this morning is this and I'm asking this to myself too I've been meditating on this this week have you been remaining in Jesus are you staying closely connected to him have you been much in prayer with him have you spent much time listening to what he has said the words that we have of his have you been remaining in him or have you been trying to do it on your own let's pray

Lord Jesus we say thank you to you for coming into our world we ask for your forgiveness for all the times that we have tried to take credit for the many good things that you have done and brought in

our lives and through us you are the true vine and everything good that we have and are comes from you I pray I pray that you would make us a church full of fruit not just for our sakes but for your name and for the blessing of this whole community and surrounding area if pruning needs to be done Lord we invite that we need that so come and work in us draw us close each one of us may we find the joy that comes from remaining in you we ask in your name amen