TEACHINGS OF JESUS (52)
I AM The True Vine
John 15:1-8

We now come to the final “I AM” saying that we are going to discuss.” We have examined 7 passages in John where we learn about various claims of Jesus and how they relate to us. Thus far we have noted, Jesus’ declaration of deity – “Before Abraham was, I AM”, the Bread of Life – He sustains us; the Light of the World – He gives us direction; the Door – only way of entrance, the Shepherd – He leads us and goes before us; The Resurrection – He is our hope of eternal life; The Way, Truth and Life – OR the living and true Way – again He is our genuine way to God. Today, “I AM the True Vine,”

This particular “I AM” statement is directed to us as believers and calls for responsibility. This statement is one of accountability and faithfulness. We must consider this in Him. Our text is part of His final discourse prior to His betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is seeking to encourage His apostles in their work after He leaves.

I. Israel and Vineyards
a. Vineyards were a crucial part of Israel’s history. They were always a grape growing and wine-producing people. It has been pointed out that grapes were needed not only for food, but also for the purification of water (the fermented grape could kill the bacteria in water that was harmful).

b. Vineyards in prophecy
i. Israel was often referred to as God’s vineyard. – Isaiah 5:1-7. In this passage, the LORD through Isaiah speaks of how Israel was His beloved vineyard. He did everything He could for her – what more could He do? But rather than producing good fruit, she brought forth wild grapes. Therefore judgment was declared against her.

ii. Psalm 80:7-18 – finds the psalmist mourning because that vineyard has been burned and cut down. There is a pleading for restoration.

iii. Jeremiah 2:21-22 – the LORD presenting His case against Israel notes they were planted as a noble vine, but their turned into a degenerate (wild) vine.

iv. Ezekiel 17:1-10 – again Israel is compared to a good planted vine that turns toward another (god – actually an eagle in the parable). Thus, it will be pulled up.

v. ALL these texts help explain what the LORD God expected of His people – to faithfully produce fruit.

c. Jesus’ use of vineyards, etc.
   i. It was used in parables – Matthew 20:1-16, 21:33-46 – parables of rejection (the vineyard was Israel that had rejected God)

   ii. Luke 13:6-7 – an unproductive fig tree in His vineyard – attempts made to restore it, but if it failed it would be cut off.

d. Thus, Israel understood very well the spiritual analogy of vineyards as they related to the nation.

e. And Jesus would have been speaking of something His apostles and disciples were familiar with.

Some believe the discourse of our text takes place after leaving from the Passover meal. Jesus might have passed a vineyard and made the analogy – but He made it applicable to the occasion.

Regardless of the setting, our emphasis is on the message.

II. I AM the Vine –

a. The various parts of this illustration – an allegory where Jesus compares Himself to something.

   i. The Vine – Jesus. He described Himself as the True Vine. Like everything else we have discussed, Jesus is real, even in this. Furthermore, He is our sustainer and life. He will make several applications to this analogy.
ii. **The Vinedresser** – is the Father. With that in mind, the vineyard would be either the world or His spiritual kingdom. Either way, it is under God’s control and He manages it.

iii. **The branches** – the disciples. First, Jesus is addressing His apostles here. But in application, WE are the branches. Consider how the branches bear likeness to the vine (cf. James 3:12 – a grapevine does not produce figs). They produce the fruit from the nutrients of the vine. Vine & branches are interconnected.

iv. **The fruit** – their produce – the product generated from the vine.

b. **Applications of this allegory**

i. There are many parts to this illustration with valuable lessons for us.

ii. **First, we are in Him** – Vs. 5 is key to this illustration.

   1. As Christians, we need to be in Jesus. Cf. Galatians 3:27

   2. Another analogy frequently used of Jesus is as a body. The body is His church (Ephesians 1:22-23) which is us (the saved). Christ is the head, just as He is the vine. We are each parts of the body, just as we are branches of the vine – 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27.

   3. Jesus being the vine, sustains us. That was His point in vs. 4 & 5 – unless He sustains you, you cannot bear fruit, and “without Me you can do nothing.” 2 Corinthians 3:5 notes that our sufficiency is from God – we need Him!

iii. **We need to abide in Him** –

   1. The idea of abiding is to dwell within or to remain within. The word “abide” is used 10 times in this passage (and implied twice more – Vs. 4 & 5 – “and I in you”). Thus it is the main emphasis.

   2. The idea of abiding in Him is a continued relationship where we are dependent on Him to sustain us. The word in vs. 5 is a continual action (present tense – vs 5). Most of its other uses are in the aorist tense, which typically represents an action without regard to time – e.g. Vs. 4 Jesus simply says, “Abide in Me...” – it is something you need to do (you have done, you are doing it, and will keep doing it in the future).

   3. Unless we are in Him, we cannot bear fruit (vs.4). This is understood in any form of gardening. Without the root, a branch will simply not produce anything – whether a watermelon or grape vine, an orange or olive tree, or a strawberry bush, etc. Jesus is emphasizing, we NEED Him.

   We have read of disciples that believed in Him, but failed to abide in Him – see John 12:42-43, 9:22 – the parents of the blind man, etc.). Sadly, they produced nothing for Him!

iv. **We are expected to bear fruit** –

   1. Let this not be misunderstood in this analogy. As Christians we are called upon to bear fruit – to be productive. It is simply not an option. In fact, when Jesus said in vs. 4, “Abide in Me” it was an imperative – meaning a direct command.

   2. What is the fruit of a Christian?

      a. It can be growth in wisdom and knowledge – 2 Peter 3:18

      b. It can be good works – Colossians 1:10

      c. It can be righteous living – Philippians 1:11

      d. It can be holiness – Romans 6:21-22

      e. It can be the fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:9, etc.

      f. It can be praise to God – the fruit of our lips – Hebrews 13:15

      g. And of course, it can be the souls that we bring to Christ.

   3. The point is, we are expected to be growing and productive in our service to our Lord.
v. **We will be pruned** –

1. A good gardener understands the importance of pruning. Pruning is cutting away the dead parts of a plant or tree, or cutting it back to direct it where she intends.
2. If you do not prune a bush, it will NOT produce as it should, because the dead and useless part of the plant will continue to rob the rest of needed nutrients. Pruning leads to more fruit.
3. As Christians, we must understand that we too need to be pruned. What this means is that at times, we may need our “wings clipped” to make us better.
   a. Paul’s thorn in the flesh was a sort of pruning and made him better (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
   b. Hebrews 12:5-11 speaks of the chastening of the Lord. The intended result is, “afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”
4. In this life, as Christians, we are going to face difficult times. We need to let these times make us better and stronger, rather than defeating us. ALSO, we need to understand that ours is to be a life of sacrifice – there are things we need to give up to make us better and more productive. So, we need to do our own “pruning” as well.

vi. **In Him we need to be clean** –

1. One observation Jesus makes is that they were already clean. These men were (except Judas Iscariot who had already left – John 13:30) godly. They had devoted themselves to the Lord and were living purified lives. Jesus had been “pruning” or “purging” (KJV) them now for 3+ years. They were ready with dedicated lives.
2. We need to remind ourselves of our need to live pure lives.
   b. 1 John 3:3 speaks of everyone with true hope, “purifies Himself even as He is pure.
   c. 2 Corinthians 7:1, Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.
3. The FIRST step to being productive in the Lord’s kingdom is to take care of our own house. Until you do that you are NOT useful to the Lord.

vii. **If non-productive, we will be taken away and cast into the fire** –

1. Note vs. 6, “If anyone does not abide in Me...” – the wording of this implies not only the need for continued productivity, but a warning that IF we fail to remain productive, we will be cast out. This demonstrates that bearing fruit is not an option. How does one not abide in Him?
   a. He chooses to walk away and becomes unfaithful – 2 Peter 2:20-21, Hebrews 10:26-31, etc.
   b. He simply does nothing. You may never leave the Lord, but if you are not producing fruit, you are in danger. Consider vs. 2, Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...
2. BOTH of these texts speak of the possibility of one falling away after becoming a Christian. NOTICE that this is one who has been abiding in the vine. He is a branch “in Me” (vs. 2). BUT, he willfully choses to walk away and therefore he is cut off by God Himself. He is taken away. And this accords with many other passages of scripture.
   a. Galatians 5:4 – “You have fallen from grace” – how can you fall from that which you never had?
b. Hebrews 4:1 speaks of fearing lest one come short of the eternal rest. Hebrews 2:1 – give the more earnest heed...lest he drift away. Hebrews 3:12 speaks of an evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God.

3. One more observation – vs. 6 – “he is cast out as a branch and withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
   a. This is a clear reference to eternal judgment – the condemnation of hell.
   b. Matthew 25:41 speaks of the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels
   c. Revelation 21:8 speaks of those who will have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. This is the same lake prepared for the devil (Revelation 20:10), and those not found in the book of life (20:13-15).

viii. NOTE: In this analogy, the branches are individuals, NOT congregations OR denominations, as some contend.

This is a lesson about productivity. God expects us to be productive in various ways. We are to grow spiritually, in knowledge, in love for one another, and even bringing others to Him. One day you will stand before God and give an accounting – what type of fruit will you present to Him? Think about it!