

The Vine and the Branches
Pastor Ty Blackburn
John 15:1-17
February 22, 2015

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 15th chapter of John. It's good to be back in the Gospel of John after so many weeks away from this book. Last time we looked at John 14, the end of John 14 was the Sunday before Christmas. And so, since then we've had a number of other messages, some topical messages, a couple of messages on New Years from Romans 12. Then, five different messages which we titled 'Unleashing the Power of the Truth', and interesting, as I've looked at this text, and studied it this week, how encouraging it is in light of the context of what we just talked about.

You know we spent five weeks talking about the challenges that face the church in the 21st Century in America, the increasing challenges spiritually, morally, culturally, and we focused on five different issues that really posed areas of confrontation for the people of God as we try to live godly lives in this world. We looked at the issue of abortion. Then we looked at the issue of homosexuality, and the idea was to look at these things that the culture is saying, and bring the word of God, and how can we unleash the power of God's truth through conversations and relationships with people. To speak the truth with clarity and conviction, but also in a context of love. So we looked at homosexuality after we looked at abortion, we looked at the issue of radical Islam, violent, militant Islam. Then we looked at racism, and last week we looked at sexual fulfillment. In all these areas, as we turn on the news, you read the newspaper, you read online the news, we see things each week that are just distressing on all these different fronts. It feels like, in a sense, you can have this sense that the church is on the defensive, and our boundaries are shrinking, and the barbarians are at the gates. How are we to live?

So we talked about that in a number of weeks, and how we are supposed to speak the truth in each circumstance, but we come to a passage today which has amazing relevance really to our mindset, and just the heart that we should have. Relating it to the psalm that I read earlier, that we are to be people who have a quiet confidence in the presence of God. No matter what the circumstances are on the outside, and we see this in John 15:1-17.

Not too long ago, there was a lady who attended our church for a brief period of time, and she asked for a meeting. It was an urgent meeting that she wanted to have, and her husband did come with her. He didn't share her concerns, but he

came with her, really to get help from us. She had been watching some of the videos online, and was convinced that the world was going to end the next week. She had come, out of concern, and help, to us, to meet with us, and help us to be prepared. So when I talked to her, I mean, she was just very frantic. She had been watching a lot of bad stuff. The Lord knows when the end is, and nobody knows the day or the hour except Him. We may be able to see some signs, and discern some things, but to know the day or the hour, right off the bat you know you've got a problem.

Then as she began telling me the other things it was just like layer upon layer of error, and so I was trying to provide correction, you know, gentle but firm correction. "The people you are listening to, these are people that are denying the Gospel, so why would you be listening to them?" But I was left afterwards, really with a heart that just hurt for her because I basically had to go somewhere else for another meeting after about an hour and 45 minutes. I said, "I've got to go. I've made a commitment, and let's meet next week." She said, "There is no possibility of meeting next week," and it just hurt to see the urgency that she felt, and yet it was zeal without knowledge. It was a dead-end kind of emotional turmoil that she was just overwhelmed, and it was doing damage to her marriage, and her children, and for some time afterwards because one the things about those crazy folks that teach that kind of stuff, once they miss the date, they just reset it. "Well, we were wrong about the day, six months later." So they keep people on a perpetual kind of dependency on them.

But anyway, the point of that was, I pondered, and I tried to tell her, "Listen, if we knew it was next week, what would we do? We should be doing already what we would do if it was next week. And what is that? I think the passage we are looking at today has that kind of a message for us. John 15:1-17 because what you have, remember the context of this passage, Jesus is giving His last words before the crucifixion. The cross, the shadow of the cross has come squarely in His path. The next day He will be crucified, and so John 13-17, we have what is called '*The Farewell Discourse*' in which Jesus is sharing His heart with His disciples right before this cataclysmic storm hits Him, and them. He is teaching them how you are to live when things are about to collapse around you, or when you feel like things are about to collapse around you. What are you to do? So each section of this '*Farewell Discourse*' has something to say and John 15:1-17 continues to give us direction. Let's read those verses together.

John 15:1-17 ~ “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another.

Let’s pray together.

Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You for inspiring a perfect revelation of Your will for us in this book. And we thank You for the gift of the Spirit to illuminate these things in our minds, and our hearts. And we pray that You would do just that, that You would apply Your word to each and every one of us, and help us to walk in paths of righteousness. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

So the title of the message is ‘The Vine and the Branches’. In this 17-verse section in which you have the metaphor laid out in the first eight verses, and then really unpacked in the next nine. I think the entire 17 verses are about this metaphor, and

what it means, and how it speaks to our lives. What I want us to do is first of all to see that, what we're going to do as we approach this, I think we are going to see today that we are going focus on what we are called to do when we find ourselves in turbulent times, in frightening circumstances, in anxious moments. What are we to do when the world is falling apart around us? And today we are going to focus more on the *What are we called to do?* Next time, *How are we to do it?* I think that is the way this passage basically says, what we are called to do is bear fruit for God, that is the basic theme of today's message. *What are we called to do?* To bear fruit for God. *How do you do that?* By abiding in the vine. So today more what we're called to do, to bear fruit for God, is the theme this morning, and next time we'll talk more about what it means. *What does it really mean to abide in the vine? How do we do that?*

1) What Are We Called to Do?

So today, what are we called to do when the world is falling apart around us? We are called to bear fruit for God. Now how do we see that? We see it when we consider the context, and the two points this morning, let me just give you the two points this morning—*The Call to Bear Fruit*, and then *The Nature of the Fruit*. Those are the two points. Before we get to those two points, I want us to talk about the context so I can fill this out a little bit of how I think Jesus, why He chooses this image at this time. It is always important for us to consider context, and often we miss the forest for the trees, or we miss the forest, or the vine field for the vines. I don't know. We've got to be careful that we see it in context. I mentioned earlier, this is *The Farewell Discourse*. It is interesting when you look back at Chapter 14, right before our passage begins. Jesus has told them in Verse 30:

John 14:30 ~I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me;

I mean, He has basically been telling them He is leaving. In fact, Chapter 14, we saw that a main theme in Chapter 14 was ***“Do not let your heart be troubled;... Remember that? Chapter 14:1, Jesus says:***

John 14:1 ~ “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

He knows they are troubled because He has just told them He is going away, and so He tells them at the beginning of Chapter 14, Verse 1, ***“Do not let your heart be troubled;... He tells them again at the end of Chapter 14, Verse 27:***

John 14:27-28 ~ Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. 28 You heard that I said to you, 'I go away,...

And then Verse 30, He says, “Look, don’t let your heart be troubled. I’m leaving,” and that is troubling.” These disciples have left everything to follow Jesus. They’ve left their homes, they’ve left their professions, they’ve left their agendas, their families, to follow Jesus, and now Jesus says He’s leaving them. It was very unsettling, very frightening, very troubling, but Jesus is telling them, “No, don’t let your heart be troubled. This is the way it has to be. I have to go to the Father, otherwise you won’t be blessed, you won’t be saved.” But then, as He continues to tell them what is going on, it is like more and more of the coming storm comes out. Verse 30 He says:

John 14:30 ~ I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming,...

The image is, Jesus is talking to them, it is getting later in the evening, and pressed upon His thoughts is the fact that Satan is coming, ***...the ruler of the world is coming,...*** He can sense that death is imminent. Remember, Judas left a little while ago. Satan entered into Judas, took him out. Jesus knows now, Judas has got the Pharisees awake and alert. And what is going on? They are wanting to come arrest Him. They are working out a plot to do that. So all of this is coming to a head, and Jesus says:

John 14:30-31 ~ ...the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; 31 but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.

“It is time to get up,” and you had the sense at the end of Chapter 14 that they are marching to meet the enemy. “Get up, let us go from here. The ruler is coming. The armies of Satan are on the way. Let us go meet the enemy.” Now they don’t fully understand that, but when we read it, looking back at it, we see that is the force of what is going on. The disciples are somewhat bewildered. They always were and they certainly are tonight, but if you skip over the metaphor, just step back, Verse 31, He just said, ***Get up, let us go from here.*** Skip down to Chapter 15, Verse 18.

John 15:18 ~ “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

...the ruler of the world is coming... and now He starts talking about the world.

John 15:18-19 ~ “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

Next verse He’s going to say, *...If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you;*... Chapter 16:2, He is going to say:

John 16:2 ~ ...but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.

From Chapter 15:18 through Chapter 16:4, those 14 verses are about coming persecution, and the battle with the world. He just said *...the ruler of the world is coming...* and now He says six times in Verses 18 to 21, the word ‘world’ is used. The ‘kosmos’, and the world as John uses it, this word ‘world’ has this battle imagery overtones. The world is not just the people out there. In fact, when you understand the etymology of the word that is used here, ‘kosmos’, it comes from the word ‘kosmeo’, which means ‘to arrange, to order’. And one of the major uses of this word was to talk about how a king, or a general, would arrange and order his armies. You know, “Put the cavalry over here to the right. Archers in the front.” You know, spearmen, swordsmen, this kind of thing, but he would arrange his armies.

So this word has some of that connotation in the way John uses it, and so He says, “Listen, you’re going to be experiencing the hostility of the world. I’m about to encounter the prince of the world, and now let me tell you that you are going to experience the hostility of the world.” But in the middle of that, sandwiched right in the middle is 17 verses about a vine. Isn’t that interesting? Why talk about the vine and the branches here? Why didn’t you just get on ahead to the world? The persecution is coming so that you can understand the storm. I think it shows us this is very relevant to what He is talking about. It is not just that He happened to see a vine. It is possible, the commentators speculate, did Jesus, when He said, “Let us get up and go from here,” did He stop and continue talking? Because in Chapter 18:1 it says:

John 18:1 ~ When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden,...

They don't actually get to the Garden of Gethsemane until Chapter 18, and some people speculate, "Well maybe they got up to leave, and they just kept talking there." You know, that happens sometimes, right? You get up to leave, that happens a lot actually, and an hour later you haven't left. It could be. I tend to think that they are walking. They have about a mile or a mile and a half depending on, we don't know the exact location for sure of the upper room. There is a place in Jerusalem that they claim it is, and maybe it is. We are not exactly sure of where the Garden of Gethsemane is. We know it is in the Mount of Olives. There are a couple of different locations that people think the garden was, but wherever you place the garden, and wherever you place the upper room, it is about a mile to a mile and a half walk that they had to make from Jerusalem to Gethsemane.

So it seems to me that the way to take it is they got up, they start walking, and along the way they see a vine. Maybe they stop and look at the vine and Jesus gives these verses. Here He is, the battle is coming, the cross is right before them, He feels an urgency of shepherding His disciples who are about to experience the vortex of this great storm, and yet He stops to talk about the vine. And He does because He knows this is key to how they are going to weather the storm. It seems very unrelated and yet it is so relevant, and related.

So He is basically saying, "When things are going crazy around you, when you think things are about to fall apart, what do you do? You focus on bearing fruit for God by abiding in the vine. That's what you do. You don't get all caught up with what is going on around you. The call is to bear fruit. It is not to fix all the problems out there, it is to bear fruit for God as He's called you to as a Christian." This image would have been very powerful and relevant for the disciples, and every first century reader. In an Agrarian economy, they would have understood the importance of a vine bearing fruit.

You know, we gardened for a few years, and we intend to do it again. We planted an area, and did tomatoes, and cucumbers. I forgot what else we did. Those were our main crops we were growing and we did okay. You know I was really happy to have some homegrown tomatoes. Isn't that an amazing blessing of God? Homegrown tomatoes? Bacon, lettuce, tomato sandwich? Where was I? No. You're growing tomatoes, or you are growing cucumbers, and we worked hard at it. We could have worked harder, but you know we tilled the soil. In fact, originally some of the guys from the church came over and helped me get the ground tilled up with the kind of tiller that you need to really do the work, and that was a blessing. And then we weeded, and all of that, but you know when we didn't end up with that many tomatoes. It wasn't that big of a deal really because we

could go to the store and buy it, or we could go to the farmer's market and buy it. But when you live in an Agrarian economy, where your life is depending upon the success of the crop, there is a lot more riding on it.

And so we need to understand that. When he says, "Listen, the vinedresser wants the vine to bear fruit," there is a lot more riding on that than when you or I might do something like that. If the plant doesn't produce then there is going to be less food. The family is going to be hungry. "If the grapevine doesn't produce the grapes, then we are not going to have the wine. We're not going to have the blessing of the grape harvest." So that is something that they could very easily see, so when He says, "***I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.***" The first thing He talks about, ***Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit,...*** Look at the emphasis on bearing fruit. Seven different times in the first nine verses, or actually seven different times in the passage, 17, six in the first nine is says, ***...bear fruit,...***

John 15:2 ~ Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

Verse 4.

John 15:4 ~ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

Verse 5.

John 15:5 ~ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Verse 6.

John 15:6 ~ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

Verse 8, He says:

John 15:8 ~ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit,...

So He said, “The Father is the vinedresser, and what He wants is fruit.” So what is God’s will for your life? Fruit, that’s right. What is God’s will for your life when things are falling apart around you? It is to bear fruit. It is not to fix all the problems out there, it is to bear fruit, to do what a grapevine branch is supposed to do, because we are branches He says. We are not the vine, but we are branches, and what we are called to do is to bear fruit.

Now, one thing we need to understand is that we are not the vine. As we continue to look at the call to bear fruit, we have to realize we are not called to produce it, we are just called to bear it because we aren’t the vine. Jesus is the vine. That is stated emphatically in the passage, “***I am the true vine***,..., Verse 1. Verse 5, ***I am the vine***,... These are examples of the ‘I AM’ sayings that are found throughout the Gospel of John. This is the seventh and final ‘I AM’ with a predicate. Remember? We’ve talked about there are 20 different times in John’s Gospel that he records on the lips of Jesus the saying ‘I AM’ with the Greek ‘*ego eimi*’.

It is an emphatic ‘I AM’, which I think, as we’ve looked at it, it is clear it is a declaration of His deity because remember the Lord’s name from Exodus 3 when Moses asked the Lord? God said, “You go to Egypt, and to Pharaoh, and tell him to let My people go, and tell the people that I have heard their cries by reason of their taskmasters. I’ve seen their suffering, and I’ve come down. You go and tell them.” And Moses says, “Who am I to go?” and He says, “I’ll be with you.” And, “When I go, what shall I say to them? Who will I tell them sent me? What is Your name?” basically, He’s saying. And God says, “You tell them that I am that I am has sent you. I am has sent you.” And so when Jesus takes this, He is intentionally drawing on that, and you see this same thing picked up in Isaiah 45 and following. If you have any concerns about that, read those, and you’ll see a number of ‘I AM’ sayings the same way. And Jesus picks up this imagery to say He’s God, but He also in being God, reveals to us something of who God is to us, what God wants to be for us through these ‘I AM’ sayings with a predicate. Of the 20 times that “Ego eimi” occurs, that ‘I AM’ occurs in John’s Gospel, twelve of them occur around seven different predicated statements.

You have first of all, “I am the bread of life,” in John 6:35, and it’s repeated in John 6:48 and John 6:51. “I am the bread,” Jesus says. The second group is, “I am the Light of the world,” John 8:12. So Jesus says, “I am the bread. I am the Light.” In John 10, He says, “I am the door,” in John 10:7 and John 10:9. He says, “I am the good shepherd,” in John 10:11 and John 10:14. He’s the door for the sheep to go in. He’s the good shepherd to lead the sheep.

In John 11, in the shadow of Lazarus' tomb, outside of Lazarus' tomb right before He's about to call into the tomb, He says to Lazarus' sister, "I am the resurrection and the life." And then the sixth is in John 14 in the same farewell discourse. We saw in the last chapter. In John 14:6, He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," and now He says, "I am the true vine." In all of these things, He's saying, "Look, I am that I am. I am God, and I am everything that you need. You're hungry and you need bread. I am the bread. You're in the dark and you need light. I am the Light. You are dead in your sins, you're dying, and you're dead. I am the resurrection and the life. You don't know which way to go. I am the door. You don't know how to get there. I am the shepherd. You don't have any life in yourself. You don't have any stability. I am the true vine."

So He's saying here, "Listen, God has called you to bear fruit, and to do that you must realize that I am the true vine." Now, there's a lot behind this, this image that He uses. In the Old Testament, one of the things that we see, in fact, turn over to Isaiah 5. It's always important to interpret these things in context. I mean, everything Jesus said is to be interpreted in the context of the Old Testament, but especially in John's Gospel he's writing to Jews and Jewish proselytes who need to come to believe Jesus is the Messiah. They have a working knowledge of the Old Testament, and the images that He uses and that John records for us that Jesus said are intended to speak directly to their issues. They know this passage. They know this image. An important Old Testament image for the nation of Israel was that Israel was God's vine. You see it here in Isaiah 5:1.

Isaiah 5

- 1** *Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.*

- 2** *He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.*

- 3** *"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge between Me and My vineyard.*

This is the Lord talking to Israel. “Judge between Me and you.”

4 *“What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?
Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless
ones?”*

God’s saying, “Listen, I took you out of Egypt.” In fact, Psalm 80:8-13 says exactly that. It’s the same image. He says, “I took a vine out of Egypt and I planted it,” and Psalm 80 is basically saying, “You planted it, and now everything’s falling apart around You. Why, oh Lord, are You letting the vineyard get trampled down?” the Psalmist is saying. Well, Isaiah is giving us the answer. “The reason I’m letting you get trampled down is because I did everything necessary as a good gardener, as the best gardener, to produce a vine that would produce good grapes, and yet My vine is producing worthless ones.” Verse 5:

5 *“So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard:
I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed;
I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.*

6 *“I will lay it waste;
It will not be pruned or hoed,
But briars and thorns will come up.
I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.”*

7 *For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel
And the men of Judah His delightful plant.
Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.*

He created it to produce good grapes, good fruit, and yet it has not produced. Jeremiah 2 says basically the same thing in Verses 21 to 24. God planted a vine, and in that chapter we see He wanted true worship, but what He got was idolatry. Isaiah said God wanted righteousness, and He got wickedness, bloodshed. So when Ezekiel 15 and Hosea 10 take the same image, Israel was a vine. Israel was God’s vine that He planted for fruit. When Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” what is He saying? “I now stand in the place of Israel. I am the true Israel.” God wanted man to produce grapes for Him, and so He planted, among all the inhabitants of the earth, He planted a vine in Canaan. He planted a vine, the Jewish people, the people of Israel, and He looked to get grapes from that, but He got no grapes, not good grapes. He got worthless ones. Jesus comes saying, I am the true vine.”

This is a key theme in John's Gospel. In fact, the word *true* is one you see repeated again and again. We saw it in John 1:9, when it said that John the Baptist came to speak for God, to testify to the Light. He says that he wasn't the Light, that he came to testify of the Light. Verse 9 says:

John 1:9 ~ There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

What is John talking about? Jesus is the true Light. He's the genuine article. In John 4:23, remember Jesus is talking to the woman of Samaria at the well? He started telling her things about her background. He asked her, "Go get your husband," and she said, "I have no husband," and He said, "Yes, you've spoken correctly. You don't have a husband. You've had five husbands, and the man that you live with now is not your husband, so you've spoken correctly." She was terrified, so she immediately diverted Him and said, "Let's talk theology. Where should we worship? Should we worship on this mountain like the Samaritans? We believe we should worship on this mountain. Or should we worship in Jerusalem?" And Jesus goes with her down that way a little ways, even though it's a diversionary tactic, because He's going to circle around her, and she's going to find that as she ran, she just ran into His Godly, gracious trap." He says, "Yes, let's talk about true worship. My Father is seeking true worshipers." He uses that same word, the same adjective that is here. True vine, true worship, that is the genuine article. Everything else is false. This is true.

The same thing is used in John 6. I mentioned that He uses the metaphor, "I am the bread." In John 6:32, three verses before He says, "I am the bread of life," He says, "Moses gave you bread from heaven, but now the true bread has come down. You see, Moses gave you manna, but now the true, genuine article bread of God is here." You even have this idea of Jesus replacing all of these Old Testament images—the feasts. The Feast of Tabernacles, He's now the fulfillment of that. That's what's happening in John 7. He's the true temple in John 2:23. Remember He says to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I'll raise it." They're like, "It took 46 years to build this temple, and You're going to destroy it in three days?" John, the author of the Gospel, says, "He was speaking of the temple of His body." You see, that's the temple, but here's the true temple. This is the true meeting place of God and man. This is the true food of the soul. This is the true path to true worship. This is the true, genuine vine.

So when we go back to John 15, what God wants is He wants us to bear fruit, but to bear fruit, we must be in the true vine. And the way that you begin to bear fruit is you have to first realize you can bear nothing, you and I can bear nothing, in ourselves. Israel had every advantage that man could have. They had the Covenants, the Law, the Torah, the feasts, all of the sacrificial system, all the things pointing to the truth of who God is, and that's all the tilling. You see, that's the caring for the vine. God put the vine there, and He tilled it, and He cared for it, and He did everything necessary, but what did it produce? It produced nothing.

Now, God of course knew in His infinite wisdom that that's what was going to happen. So Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world. But in the course of showing us that we could offer to God nothing, He shows us, "Look at the great work I've done to till the soil for this vine, and it produced worthless grapes." So Israel failed, and what that says is for you and me, most of us are Gentiles in this room, that we would have failed worse. Don't look down on the Jews. No, we were the ones in the dark and had been in the dark all along, and we had no hope of offering anything to God. That's the message of this. After Adam and Eve fell, Jesus is the only Man that has ever lived that can do things that please God. You and I, even our best moments are tainted by sin.

So what we must trust in is His finished work. Now, we're called to bear fruit, though. So bearing fruit means that first of all, hey, my job in this moment is to bear fruit for God. To do that, I've got to be connected to Jesus, and that's what we're going to talk about next time, what it means to abide in Christ. Essentially it means hold onto Jesus. Keep your focus on Jesus. Don't be thinking about all the things that are happening around you. Keep your focus on Jesus. But that's the call to bear fruit, and now I want to talk about the nature of the fruit we're called to bear. We're still asking the question, "What are we called to do?" We're called to bear fruit. Well, what's that fruit? What's the nature of the fruit?

2) The Nature of the Fruit:

There is some disagreement when you read the commentaries on this. It's not spelled out explicitly in the text, and I think it's one of those things that requires careful study and thought. The Lord doesn't leave His jewels and treasures on the ground. You've got to dig to find diamonds. You've got to dig to find gold. "Seek Me with your whole heart and you will find Me." So He often leaves His precious truth buried where we have to dig for it.

Well, when we think about that, one of the ways you answer a question, what's this fruit? He keeps talking about bearing fruit. What is the fruit? I think there are a number of ways you answer that First of all, you consider the Old Testament background, which we looked at a little bit ago. I mentioned to you, what's the fruit God's looking for? He says in Verse 1:

John 15:1 ~ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

He could have left that out and said, "I am the vine and you are the branches." In fact, that's the way I've titled it. I've titled it *The Vine and the Branches*, but it could be titled *The Vinedresser and the Branches*, because Jesus right off the bat talks about the vinedresser. He wants us to know that God is the vinedresser, and God is the one whose interest we need to be looking at. What is it that God is interested in? That's really the key to always finding God's will in any situation is to turn it around and say, "What is it that God wants in this situation?" not, "What do I want?" Well, God wants fruit, and we've seen that, but what kind of fruit? What is the nature of the fruit we're called to bear?

Isaiah, I mentioned, do you remember when we read that passage, he said in Verse 7, "I looked for righteousness but found bloodshed. I looked for justice but found crying out." So God planted Israel, and in Isaiah He says, "What I was looking for was righteousness and justice. I was looking for godly character. I was looking for holy behavior. I was looking for obedience." Jeremiah 2:21-24, when you read that chapter and that section even in context, what you see Jeremiah is rebuking the nation for is idolatry. But God says in Verse 21, "I've planted you a choice vine, but you've become perverted," and He talks about, "You've been perverted, and stained with the Baals." So what is God saying? "I planted a vine. What fruit was I looking for? I was looking for true worship. I was looking for genuine worship, but what have I found? I've found idolatry." So the Old Testament background says God wants obedience and He wants worship.

Then you come into John's Gospel and look at what John says about what the Lord is looking for. Well, I just mentioned a moment ago the word *true worship*. He's looking for true worship in John 4:23. But in the immediate context, what does He say? And as we read through the passage, we begin to see some other things come to the surface that reinforce what we've already said, and also add some dynamic to it. In the passage, He says, "I want you to bear fruit." What kind of fruit does the Lord describe in this passage itself? We could maybe define three things in this passage.

First of all, He says, “What I want you to be about is a relationship with Me. The fruit that I’m looking for is a person who is seeking to walk before Me.” Ten times in the passage you have the word *abide*. Isn’t that amazing? It’s used ten times.

John 15:4 ~ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

Relationship—what we should be doing in any moment is looking for a relationship with God. The most important thing in any moment is our walk with the Lord. The second thing is related to that, which is love. The word *love* occurs seven times in this passage, actually eight times in Verses 9 to 13.

John 15:9 ~ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

We’re to love God. We’re to abide in the love of God. What we should be doing when things are falling apart around us is putting our focus on the Lord and loving Him. Can anything stop that? It doesn’t matter what happens around you, you can still be loving God, and praising God, and worshiping God. Even if things are falling apart and you see the world coming apart at its seams, what you say is, “Lord thank You that You keep the righteous, that You’ve told me...” One of the things I love in the Old Testament as you read the Psalms is how many times you find an image like refuge, shelter, and fortress. The Lord wants to be your refuge. He wants to be your shield. He wants to be your fortress. He wants to be your rock. He wants to be your deliverer, and He blesses those who look to Him for that.

So when things are falling apart, when you feel like the sky’s falling down, what do you need to do? You need to get in a refuge, and He reminds you of that. So as the world’s coming apart, “Lord, You’re just putting me in a situation where I have to think all the time about getting in the refuge. Thank You for loving me enough to let me live in this day, that I could go through this circumstance to make me run into You.” So you’re loving Him and thanking Him for who He is, and praising Him that He’s still sovereign. This is exactly what happens if America does continue to go down the steps of moral decay, if we experience terrorism and more attacks, or we experience financial catastrophe, does it change our calling? No, our calling is to bear fruit for God. They can’t take that away from us. That should be so freeing.

If you love Christ, nothing can happen in your life that can deter you from your most important reason for living, just to love God, to worship Him, to live in relationship with Him, loving Him, and loving others, loving other Christians. Twice in the passage, in Verse 12 and in Verse 17, He says, “I command you to love one another.” So when things are falling down around you, love other believers. We’re supposed to love all people, but especially, He’s saying, “Love the brotherhood. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ.”

What they did in the 1st Century when they went through what He talks about in John 16, when they were being arrested and hunted down, what did the Christians do? They kept loving one another. They visited one another in prison. They cared for one another, and the glory of their love shone out so that the unbelievers saw it. So we see in John 15 relationship, love, and obedience. There it is echoing what we saw in Isaiah. Five times the word *command* or *commandment* is used.

John 15:10 ~ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

John 15:12 ~ “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

So we need to be about worshiping God, which is relationship, love, and obedience. Loving Him, obeying Him, trusting Him, and seeking His face. That lady that came into my office that day, I was trying to tell her that. What we need to do, it hasn’t changed, even if you’re right, because you’re not, because a guy can’t really know that the world’s going to end next Thursday, so he’s wrong, but even if it were, what you need to do is keep loving God and loving those around you. She was neglecting her children. She was on the internet all the time. She was calling people all the time. Well, you’ve got to care for your children, care for your husband, be about the Father’s business. That’s what it means. It doesn’t mean that you’re sitting there counting the moments down. No, you’re being faithful to the end. That’s what it means to be a faithful servant to the end.

God wants fruit. No matter what the circumstances, He wants the same fruit, and it’s kind of freeing. A grapevine doesn’t have to stress about what it’s going to do today. If it’s a good day, a sunny day, “Hmm, what am I going to do? I think I need to produce grapes.” If it’s a rainy day, a stormy day, “What am I going to do? I’m going to produce grapes.” There are people coming in, there’s a war going on, “What am I going to do? Keep producing grapes.” That’s all we’re called to do.

In Psalm 131, “Like a weaned child against the breast of his mother, I’ve quieted my soul,” David says. “I’m not concerning myself with matters too great for me.” Isn’t that astonishing that the King of Israel said that? I mean, he had some important things coming across his desk, and he said, “The way I live before God is I don’t concern myself with matters too great for me. I’ve quieted my soul in the presence of my God. I’m trusting Him, and I’m loving Him, and I’m obeying Him, and that’s what I’m called to do today, and tomorrow, and until He comes.” May God help us do that.

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer...

Father, we praise You. We rejoice in Your sovereign governance of the world. We rejoice that You govern the big things, the movements of history, the decisions of nations, and You govern the smallest atoms and molecules. All are working according to Your purpose and Your plan, and because You’ve got it all under complete, perfect control, we don’t need to concern ourselves with those things. We’re to live lives of praising You, trusting You, and loving You.

Father, help us be more obedient. Help us to repent of our pride, for anxiety, and fear, and anger, and the spirit of striving, and fretting, really is us just trying to assume a position that does not belong to us. It’s us trying to sit on Your throne. God, may we hate that, and may we humble ourselves under Your mighty hand and do what You’ve called us to do.

We thank you for so perfect a Savior that lived a perfect life that was true Man, tempted in every way, experienced every kind of distress, every kind of difficulty, yet He did it in a completely obedient and holy way. He was tempted in every way, yet without sin. Not only did He never transgress against the Law of God, but He perfectly fulfilled the positive demands of the Law. His meat and His drink was to do Your will. So when You look at Jesus, You see fruit that thrills Your heart.

How grateful we are, oh Lord, that those who have repented of their sins and placed their faith in Christ and His shed blood on Calvary, His resurrection, that You now see us as if we have that fruit in our lives and our hearts. May we rest in that. May we rejoice in that, and may that so fill our hearts with wonder, that our lives reflect more the radiance of Your purity and Your goodness every day. We pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

This audio presentation, description, and transcription by Providence Church in Duluth, Georgia, USA, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.

 Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Attribution:

Based on work at Providence Church, Duluth, GA, USA and found online at <http://www.providenceduluth.org>. Permission for use beyond the scope of this license may be requested by contacting Providence Church, Duluth, GA through their website.