

Exalting Jesus Christ

"Abiding in Jesus and Bearing Much Fruit"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. The land of Israel – or, Palestine, as it was known in the days of Jesus – is a geographically diverse country.
 - A. It's a land of fertile plains, rocky hills, and semi–barren deserts.
 1. And even though the spring and fall rainy seasons in Palestine are relatively short, farmers rarely depended on irrigation for water.
 2. They learned how to grow crops according to the yearly cycle of rainy and dry spells.
 3. They also learned to adjust the crops to what was best for the different kinds of soil.
 4. Grains, such as wheat and barley, were perhaps the most important crop for the Jews living in Palestine because those crops were used to bake bread.
 5. Fruits and vegetables of just about every imaginable kind were also grown in the fertile soils – and still are today.
 - B. But one crop which seemed to flourish in Palestine was the grape.
 1. Lush vineyards literally blanketed the rolling hills of Palestine, especially in the regions where rainfall was just right.

- a. Too little rain and the crop perished.
 - b. Too much rain, especially in the early spring, will knock the blooms off the vines and produce a smaller crop.
 - c. And too much rain in the fall, during time of harvest, will cause the grapes to swell and burst while still on the vine.
2. Since vineyards were such a common sight in Palestine, Jesus used them, and the work that went on there, to illustrate some of His greatest teachings.
- a. In Matthew chapter 20 we find the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard who were each paid the same wages, despite the fact that some were called to work in the vineyard close to the end of the work-day.
 - b. In Matthew chapter 21 Jesus taught the Parable of the Two Sons in which a father asks his sons to go work in his vineyard. One says he will, but doesn't. And the other says he won't, but later changed his mind and did as his father had commanded.
 - c. Also in Matthew chapter 21, Mark chapter 12, and Luke chapter 20, we find the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers who refused to pay the absentee owner the rent he was due. Eventually, they murdered each servant that was sent to

collect the rent – and finally, they even murdered the vineyard owner's son when he came seeking payment.

- II. In our series of studies through the gospel of John, entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ", we come to the fifteenth chapter where we find Jesus using the vineyard to teach another valuable lesson.
 - A. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus met one last time with His disciples to celebrate the Passover, and to explain that He was about to die and will be returning to the Father in heaven.
 - 1. This news caused the hearts of these troubled disciples to become overwhelmed with uncertainty and fear.
 - 2. Even though Jesus reassured them by promising to send them the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, He wanted to stress the importance of them remaining faithful – regardless of what was about to happen over the next few hours.
 - B. The message Jesus gave these worried disciples is the same message He gives to us – the absolute necessity of "Abiding in Jesus and Bearing Much Fruit."
 - 1. Over the next few minutes we're going to look at the most important lesson we need to learn as followers of Jesus Christ.

2. The theme of this lesson deals with the absolute necessity of our relationship with Jesus as His disciple, and how critically important it is to maintain that relationship.
 - a. The key word in this lesson is found repeated some ten times in the first eleven verses of John chapter fifteen – it's the word "abide."
- C. So, let's open our Bibles to the fifteenth chapter of John and see what Jesus said to His disciples on this occasion, and then look at what these words meant to them, and what they should mean to us as well.
 1. To do this, I want us to begin by making a few preliminary observations about these first eleven verses.
 2. Then, focus on the interpretation of these verses.
 3. And finally, make some personal application from the teaching of Jesus here.
- D. So, let's begin by first reading these verses together.
 1. **John 15:1-11** – *"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, 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, 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, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. 9 As the Father loved Me, I also have 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, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

BODY:

- I. As I mentioned earlier, before we get into the interpretation and application of these verses, let's make some preliminary observations.
 - A. There are four very important things we see in these verses.
 1. First, the entire passage – the words Jesus spoke here – are only for those who are His disciples.
 - a. Jesus is addressing that small group of His most trusted disciples – the apostles.
 - b. He's not addressing the multitudes.

- c. Therefore, His words are aimed at those who already have established a relationship with Him.
2. Second, these verses revolve around a metaphor.
 - a. The word picture Jesus paints here is that of a vine and its branches.
 - b. And the central idea of that word picture is the absolute necessity of maintaining a vital union between the vine and branches.
3. Third, the main subject – as we said earlier – concerns abiding.
 - a. Jesus uses the image of a fruit-bearing branch connected to the vine.
 - b. Therefore, the thrust of His teaching here is not about becoming a Christian, but on becoming a productive Christian.
4. And finally, the result of the branch abiding in the vine is its ability to bear fruit. In fact, just look at how many times Jesus speaks of this in these eleven verses.
 - a. **John 15:2a** – *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away. . ."*
 - b. **John 15:2b** – *". . .every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."*
 - c. **John 15:4** – *"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."*

d. **John 15:5b** – *"He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. . ."*

e. **John 15:8** – *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit. . ."*

5. So, now that we've made these preliminary observations, let's focus on the interpretation of this message.

II. In these verses, Jesus paints a picture in which three great symbols stand out: the vine, the vinedresser, and the branch.

A. Jesus immediately sets out to identify Himself as the genuine vine –

John 15:1 – *"I am the true vine. . ."*

1. Jesus is making the bold claim of being the only source of spiritual life for you and me as His disciples.

2. And since He is the source of spiritual life, then He alone is the source of the spiritual nourishment we need as Christians to bear fruit.

a. Many view the "fruit" of John 15 as the result of personal evangelism – fruit we bear by bringing the lost to Jesus Christ.

b. However, I don't think that's the main thought of Jesus here.

c. Most likely, the "fruit" of which Jesus speaks refers to the Christ-like qualities we must bear as His disciples.

- d. This would be *"the fruit of the Spirit"* (cf. **Galatians 5:22-23**):
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness and self-control.
 - e. Unless we first bear this Christ-like fruit in our lives, then we'll
never be successful at bearing fruit by bringing the lost to
Christ.
 - f. We will completely fail to convince others to make Jesus
Christ the Lord of their life, unless they can first see that He is
the Lord of our lives.
 - g. So, it seems the fruit Jesus wants us to bear in our lives is the
same Christ-like character we see in His.
- B. Next, Jesus spoke of the Vinedresser – **John 15:1** – *"I am the true vine,
and My Father is the vinedresser."*
- 1. It's interesting to see Jesus depicting God the Father as a busy,
active vinedresser, working in His vineyard.
 - 2. But this image was nothing new. It's an image that had already
been well-established by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.
 - a. **Isaiah 5:1-4** – *"Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of
my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a
vineyard on a very fruitful hill. 2 He dug it up and cleared out
its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a
tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He*

expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. 3 'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?'"

- b. Then, in verse seven, Isaiah explains the meaning of this song: **Isaiah 5:7** – *"For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help."*
 - c. Unfortunately, for the people of Judah in the days of Isaiah, the prophet painted the sad image of God as a faithful Vinedresser doing everything to bless His people in every way, only to see them essentially bear *"wild grapes"* by turning away from Him.
3. Although Jesus may have had this passage from Isaiah in mind when He talked of His Father being the Vinedresser – the Lord added two actions that every faithful vinedresser does.
- a. **John 15:2a** – *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away. . ."*

b. **John 15:2b** – ". . .every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

4. When a branch becomes unproductive and fails to yield fruit, a good vinedresser cuts that branch away from the vine.

a. Merrill Tenney explains it this way in his commentary:

"Viticulture. . . consists mainly of pruning. In pruning a vine, two principles are generally observed: first, all dead wood must be ruthlessly removed; and second, the live wood must be cut back drastically. Dead wood harbors insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot, to say nothing of being unproductive and unsightly. Live wood must be trimmed back in order to prevent such heavy growth that the life of the vine goes into the wood rather than into fruit.

The vineyards in the early spring look like a collection of barren, bleeding stumps; but in the fall they are filled with luxuriant purple grapes. As the farmer wields the pruning knife on his vines, so God cuts dead wood out from among His saints, and often cuts back the living wood so far that His method seems cruel. Nevertheless, from those who have suffered the most, there often comes the greatest fruitfulness." (Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, pp. 227-228).

5. For the plant, pruning is never a pleasant experience – yet without it, the vine would wind up a tangle of unproductive overgrowth.
 - a. Could God be pruning your life right now?
 - b. If so, it can be a painful process, and you will probably bleed more than you will produce fruit.
 - c. But if your branches are feeling the pain of God's pruning shears, take hope.
 - d. Just as there is a time to be pruned, there is also a time to be productive – and that's only a short growing season away.
- C. And finally, Jesus used the figure of a branch to depict you and me as His disciples.
 1. Look at verses two and four:
 - a. **John 15:2** – *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;* and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."*
 - b. **John 15:4** – *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."*
 2. But notice something Jesus said back in verse 2 – where He makes an important distinction between *our position in the vine*,

which is Christ, and *our ability to be productive*, which is bearing fruit.

3. This difference is made even clearer when we compare verse 2 with verse 4.
 - a. When Jesus said, "*Every branch in Me*" in verse 2, He was speaking about our position in Him. We are "in Christ" – we are so intimately connected to Christ as His disciples that we are "in Him" and He is "in us."
 - b. But when Jesus said, "*Abide in Me*" in verse 4, He was speaking to those who are already His disciples, showing us what we must do to be productive – or, to be fruitful. We must abide in Him.
4. This distinction helps us understand the two activities of every disciple of Jesus Christ – the two activities of all who are "*in Him*."
 - a. First, we have the responsibility of "abiding" in Him – of maintaining that close and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.
 - b. And second, we have the responsibility of doing what everyone who abides in Him does – namely, "*bear much fruit*" by being a productive follower of Jesus Christ.

5. Notice that the command here is not to "bear fruit" but to "abide" in Him.
 - a. When we are abiding in Christ – when we are maintaining that close intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior – bearing fruit comes naturally.
6. Furthermore, the fruit of which Jesus spoke here is not produced by the branch, but by the vine.
 - a. **John 15:5** – *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."*
 - b. Without abiding in Christ, we will never be successful in bearing true spiritual fruit of any kind – absolutely nothing!
7. And verse 6 explains the eternal consequences of not abiding in Christ.
 - a. **John 15:6** – *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."*
 - b. If we fail to abide in Christ – if we fail to maintain a close, intimate relationship with Christ – then we become barren, and completely useless as a disciple.

- c. Sadly, the end result for us will be the same for the barren, fruitless branches. The vinedresser comes in and cuts it away and throws it into a fire to be burned to ashes.
 - d. Make no mistake about it. Jesus is speaking here of our being eternally separated from Him by being cast into the fires of torment.
8. Interestingly, in verses 7 through 11, Jesus also left His disciples with some encouraging news by showing four blessings that come from abiding in Him.
- a. The first blessing of abiding in Christ is answered prayers:
John 15:7 – *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."*
 - b. The second blessing is that God is glorified: **John 15:8** – *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."*
 - c. Third, by abiding in Christ, we will be the recipients of divine love: **John 15:9-10** – *"As the Father loved Me, I also have 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."*

- d. And finally, by abiding in Christ, we will live a life where we experience joy in abundance – a joy that allows us to smile even through the darkest hours of our lives:

John 15:11 – *"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."*

III. Before we wrap up this lesson, let's make some practical and personal application to the things Jesus has said here.

A. There are two important truths that emerge from this study.

1. First, refusing to abide in Christ results in spiritual barrenness and unfaithfulness now, and the terrible consequences of someday being cut off forever and cast into the fires of hell.
 - a. Let me make something crystal clear.
 - b. Being a disciple of Christ and abiding in Christ is far more than simply showing up for Bible class and worship.
 - c. The Lord isn't going to look at your attendance record.
 - d. Rather, He's going to look deep into your heart to discover whether you had the desire to abide in Him – whether you had the desire to maintain a close, intimate relationship with Him as your Lord and Savior.
 - e. If that desire is missing, then it will not only impact your attendance, it will have an impact on where your heart is when

you do attend, and on everything you do in life – on the very way you live your life.

2. On the flip side, abiding in Christ guarantees fruitfulness – and usefulness to the Lord. You will be productive.

a. Abiding in Christ, by maintaining that close and intimate relationship with Him every day of your life, will produce the fruit of a Christ-like character.

b. You will be a blessing to everyone around you.

c. And the reason why you will be such a blessing is because you not only abide in Him, but because you keep His commandments – you live every day of your life faithfully keeping His word.

d. You will be like the person the psalmist David described:

Psalm 1:1-3 – *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.*

CONCLUSION:

- I. Are you abiding in Jesus?
 - A. Do you live every day of your life cherishing a close, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life?
 1. Are you bearing the fruit of a Christ-like life – where everyone around you sees Jesus in you, and in everything you do?
 2. Are you receiving the blessings of one who abides in Christ?
 - a. Are your prayers answered?
 - b. Is God glorified by your life?
 - c. Are you confident that you are the recipient of Christ's divine love?
 - d. Are you able to experience the fullness of joy – even during times of pain and darkness?
 - B. How you honestly answer those questions will give you at least some indication of whether you are truly abiding in Christ as a branch abides in the life-giving vine.
 1. If this moment of soul-searching has raised doubts in your mind about truly abiding in Christ, then don't waste another moment.
 - a. Don't risk the day when the Vinedresser will cut you off from the Vine and cast you into the fire.

- b. Simply come to Christ, confessing your failures to God the Father, and start today to live a new life totally and completely devoted to Jesus Christ.
2. And if you realize you're not a disciple of Christ – if you have never come to Christ in obedience to the gospel, then don't waste another moment being separated from the Vine.
- a. Come to Christ repenting of your past sins, confessing your faith in Him, and be buried with Him in baptism so that your sins can be washed away, and so that you can finally be "in Christ."