

Series: Jesus 7 'I AM' Statements

"I AM the True Vine"

John 15:1 - 8

Big Idea – It is our responsibility as believers to abide in Christ.

John 15:1-8

1. "I am the true vine; my Father is the vine-dresser.
- 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.
- 3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you.
- 4 Abide or remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in the vine. In the same way, you cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in me.
- 5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.
- 6 If any do not remain in me, they are like a branch that is thrown away and then dies. People pick up dead branches, throw them into the fire, and burn them.
- 7 If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you.
- 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

1. The vine – the Lord Jesus Christ

3 vines mentioned in Bible

1. The past vine was the nation of Israel (see Ps. 80:8-19; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10-14; and Hosea 10:1). In an act of wonderful grace, God "transplanted" Israel into Canaan and gave the nation every possible benefit. "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?" God asked (Isa. 5:4). If ever a nation had everything it needed to succeed, it was Israel.

But the vine produced wild grapes! Instead of practicing justice, it practiced oppression; instead of producing righteousness, it produced unrighteousness and cries of distress from the victims. God had to deal with the nation Israel and chasten it, but even that did not produce lasting results. When God's own Son came to the vineyard, they cast Him out and killed Him (Matt. 21:33-46).

2. a future vine, "the vine of the earth" described in Revelation 14:14-20.

This is the Gentile world system ripening for God's judgment

Believers are branches in "the vine of heaven," but the unsaved are branches in "the vine of the earth." The unsaved depend on this world for their sustenance and satisfaction, while believers depend on Jesus Christ. The "vine of the earth" will be cut down and destroyed when Jesus Christ returns.

3. present Vine is our Lord Jesus Christ, and, of course, the vine includes the branches. He is the "true Vine," that is, "the original of which all other vines are a copy." As Christians, we do not live on substitutes!

The symbolism of the Vine and branches is similar to that of the Head and the body: we have a living relationship to Christ and belong to Him.

2. The branches – all Christ-followers, or believers in Jesus Christ

By itself, a branch is weak and useless. It is good for either bearing or burning, but not for building (read Ezek. 15). The branch cannot produce its own life; it must draw that life from the vine.

Our fellowship with Christ through the Holy Spirit that makes possible the bearing of the fruit.

Many metaphors of Christ and the believer given in Scripture emphasize this important concept of union and communion:

the body and its members (1 Cor. 12),

the bride and the Bridegroom (Eph. 5:25-33),

the sheep and the Shepherd (John 10).

A member of the body cut off from the body would die. The marriage creates the union, but it takes daily love and devotion to maintain the communion. The shepherd brings the sheep into the flock, but the sheep must follow the shepherd in order to have protection and provision.

The sooner we as believers discover that we are but branches, the better we will relate to the Lord; for we will know our own weakness and confess our need for His strength.

The key word is abide; it is used eleven times in John 15:1-11 ("continue" in John 15:9 and "remain" in John 15:11).

What does it mean to "abide"?

It means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit. This absolutely involves the Word of God and the confession of sin so that nothing hinders our communion with Him (John 15:3). It also involves obeying Him because we love Him (John 15:9-10).

How can we tell when we are "abiding in Christ"? Is there a special feeling?

No, but there are special evidences that appear and they are unmistakably clear.

For one thing, when you are abiding in Christ, you produce fruit (John 15:2). Talk about what it is later.

Experience the Father's "pruning" so that you will bear more fruit (John 15:2). The believer who is abiding in Christ has his prayers answered (John 15:7) and experiences a deepening love for Christ and for other believers (John 15:9, 12-13). He also experiences joy (John 15:11).

This abiding relationship is natural to the branch and the vine, but it **must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic.**

Abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God's Word, prayer, sacrifice, and service—but what a joyful experience it is! Once you have begun to cultivate this deeper communion with Christ, you have no desire to return to the shallow life of the careless Christian.

3. The vine-dresser – the heavenly Father

The vinedresser is in charge of caring for the vines, and Jesus said that this is the work of His Father. He "purges" or prunes the branches so they will produce more fruit. Note the progression here: no fruit (John 15:2), fruit, more fruit, much fruit (John 15:5, 8). Many Christians pray that God will make them more fruitful, but they do not enjoy the pruning process that follows!

The vinedresser prunes the branches in two ways: he cuts away dead wood that can breed disease and insects, and he cuts away living tissue so that the life of

the vine will not be so dissipated that the quality of the crop will be jeopardized. In fact, the vinedresser will even cut away whole bunches of grapes so that the rest of the crop will be of higher quality. God wants both quantity and quality.

This pruning process is the most important part of the whole enterprise, and the people who do it must be carefully trained or they can destroy an entire crop. Some vineyards invest two or three years in training the "pruners" so they know where to cut, how much to cut, and even at what angle to make the cut.

The greatest judgment God could bring to a believer would be to let him alone, let him have his own way. Because God loves us, He "prunes" us and encourages us to bear more fruit for His glory. If the branches could speak, they would confess that the pruning process hurts; but they would also rejoice that they will be able to produce more and better fruit.

Your Heavenly Father is never nearer to you than when He is pruning you. Sometimes He cuts away the dead wood that might cause trouble; but often He cuts off the living tissue that is robbing you of spiritual vigor. Pruning does not simply mean spiritual surgery that removes what is bad. It can also mean cutting away the good and the better so that we might enjoy the best. Yes, pruning hurts, but it also helps. We may not enjoy it, but we need it.

How does the Father prune us? Sometimes He simply uses the Word to convict and cleanse us. (The word translated "purge" in John 15:2 is the same as "clean" in John 13:10. See Eph. 5:26-27.) Sometimes He must chasten us (Heb. 12:1-11). At the time, it hurts when He removes something precious from us; but as the "spiritual crop" is produced, we see that the Father knew what He was doing.

The more we abide in Christ, the more fruit we bear; and the more fruit we bear, the more the Father has to prune us so that the quality keeps up with the quantity. Left to itself, the branch might produce many clusters, but they will be inferior in quality. God is glorified by a bigger crop that is also a better crop.

4. The fruit – like results, but different

The word results is often heard in conversations among Christian workers, but this is not actually a Bible concept. A machine can produce results, and so can a robot, but it takes a living organism to produce fruit. It takes time and cultivation to produce fruit; a good crop does not come overnight.

We must remember that the branches do not eat the fruit: others do. We are not producing fruit to please ourselves but to serve others. We should be the kind of

people who "feed" others by our words and our works. "The lips of the righteous feed many" (Prov. 10:21).

Several different kinds of spiritual fruit are named in the Bible. We bear fruit when we win others to Christ (Rom. 1:13). We are a part of the harvest (John 4:35-38). As we grow in holiness and obedience, we are bearing fruit (Rom. 6:22). Paul considered Christian giving to be fruit from a dedicated life (Rom. 15:28). "The fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23) is the kind of Christian character that glorifies God and makes Christ real to others. Even our good works, our service, grow out of our abiding life (Col. 1:10). The praise that comes from our hearts and lips is actually fruit to the glory of God (Heb. 13:15).

Many of these things could be counterfeited by the flesh, but the deception would eventually be detected, for real spiritual fruit has in it the seeds for more fruit. Man-made results are dead and cannot reproduce themselves, but Spirit-produced fruit will go on reproducing from one life to another. There will be fruit—more fruit—much fruit.

A true branch, united with the vine, will always bear fruit. Not every branch bears a bumper crop, just as not every field has a bumper harvest (Matt. 13:8, 23), but there is always fruit where there is life. If there is no fruit, the branch is worthless and it is cast away and burned. I do not believe our Lord is teaching here that true believers can lose their salvation, for this would contradict what He taught in John 6:37 and 10:27-30. It is unwise to build a theological doctrine on a parable or allegory. Jesus was teaching one main truth—the fruitful life of the believer—and we must not press the details too much. Just as an unfruitful branch is useless, so an unfruitful believer is useless; and both must be dealt with. It is a tragic thing for a once-fruitful believer to backslide and lose his privilege of fellowship and service. If anything, John 15:6 describes divine discipline rather than eternal destiny. "There is [for believers] a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16).

1 Corinthians 11:29 For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself.

30 That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.

31 But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way.

32 Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

