

Vine and Branches

GOSPEL OF JOHN SUMMER SERIES

Isaiah 5:1-7 Romans 11:13-22 John 15:1-6

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In the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches us over and over again that He is the great **I AM** of the Old Testament. The **I AM** is the name of God that was revealed to Moses and in the burning bush. The Lord was going to save His people from slavery to the Egyptians; God was calling Moses to lead the Israelites on the Exodus. This God who saves is named **I AM WHO I AM**; the **I AM** is the God who saved, led, and protected the Israelites throughout the Old Testament times.

This **I AM**, this God, *became flesh and dwelt among us*. It's Jesus! He is **I AM**.

One of the unique ways that Jesus teaches this to us is with His seven **I AM** statements in the Gospel of John. You might be familiar with some of these.

1. **I AM** the Bread of Life
2. **I AM** the Light of the world
3. **I AM** the Gate of the Sheep
4. **I AM** the Good Shepherd
5. **I AM** the Resurrection and the Life
6. **I AM** the Way, the Truth, and the Life
7. **I AM** the Vine

Today we want to focus on the last one: *Jesus is the True Vine*. Jesus describes our relationship to Him in *no uncertain terms*.

Jesus said, "**I AM** the **True Vine**, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . . **I AM** the **Vine**; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:1,2,5

Jesus is the True Vine, *we are the branches*, without Him we can do nothing.

In fact, **without Him**, we are cut off from the vine and thrown in the fire . . . which means eternal death.

St. Paul helps us understand this image, and how we became part of the **True Vine** in the first place. St. Paul writes that we have been **grafted** into the **Vine**; that God intentionally **connected** us to His Son Jesus Christ through faith. Faith is pictured as being **grafted** into the **True Vine** of the Lord Jesus Christ. That grafting" is what St. Paul talked about today in the Roman scripture lesson.

You, although a wild olive shoot, were **grafted in** among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree . . . remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Romans 11:17-18

Christ is the "root" that supports us, He is the **True Vine** and *we are the branches*. In the waters of Holy Baptism, you were **united** to Christ; your sins were forgiven, and you were given new life. God the Father, the "farmer" in this image, **grafted** you to the Lord Jesus Christ, the **True Vine**. Your life comes from Him; without Him, you can do nothing.

And we needed God to do this for us, because there's no way we could do this ourselves. Our sin separates us from God; Original Sin totally and thoroughly corrupts us so that we are like those dead branches that are collected and thrown into the fire. On our own we have no hope whatsoever.

But God comes to us, we are saved by grace! God the Father does the work of **grafting** you into the **True Vine**; He **connects** you to His Son Jesus Christ by faith alone. He unites you to His Son in Holy Baptism. *That is why Holy Baptism is so important!*

God the Father sent His Son Jesus to do the work of salvation for you. Jesus' perfect life, and His sacrificial death on the cross, saves you from being thrown into the fire.

The great **I AM** does the work to save
His New Testament people
just as He did the work to save
His Old Testament people.

The **I AM** suffers and dies in your place, and you are set free from sin, guilt, and death. Or to use the analogy of the **Vine**, you were **grafted** into the **True Vine** of the Lord Jesus Christ and you now have life, *eternal life*! In Christ, you will **NOT** be thrown into the fire! In Christ, you will not die in your sins.

Jesus said, "**I AM** the **Vine**; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."
John 15:5

This now becomes our identity as Christians. This is how you are to think about yourself. You are connected to Jesus. You belong to Him. Your life is in Him. Without Him you can do nothing. You are **grafted** into the **Vine**. And this changes everything about you! In this passage in John, Jesus teaches us that we are to live in Him and **bear much fruit**! Our lives reflect our faith! God the Father, the "farmer" in this image, expects you to **bear fruit** because you have been grafted into His Son Jesus Christ.

Bearing fruit means **good works**; it is obeying the 10 Commandments, it is loving God and serving other people. It is being faithful in your vocations. Because you are connected to the **Vine** you have life, and signs of Christ's life will be seen in you, things like Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Self-Control. These things are fruit from the Vine! You live a holy life because you have been grafted into Christ by faith! Jesus said, **I AM** the **Vine**; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit!

One of the things that Jesus warns us about in this passage is *apostasy*. *Apostasy* is falling away from the faith, in this image of the *True Vine*, *apostasy* is not bearing fruit and being cut off from the *Vine*.

Jesus teaches us that it is possible for Christians to fall away from the faith. The only way that happens, though, is if you **cut yourself off** from the source of life itself: *Jesus the Vine*.

- ⇒ If you close your ears to the Word of God; if you harden your heart, if you stop listening to the Word --> *you will not bear fruit, and will be cut off from the Vine.*
- ⇒ If your worship is halfhearted or distant, if you don't understand the significance of your Baptism, if you don't understand Holy Communion --> *you will not bear fruit, and you may be cut off from the Vine.*
- ⇒ If your faith is a hobby; if you think God doesn't care about your neglect of Him and His Word, if the Christian faith is not serious to you; if you are entangled with sin and are unrepentant, if you are pursuing the ways of this world --> *you will not bear fruit, and you will be cut off from the Vine.*

Christianity is no game: this is eternal life and eternal death. Jesus gives us a strong warning! You are to fear, love, and trust God above all things. In this image of the *True Vine* Jesus is clear: God the Father will cut off dead branches.

You certainly do not want to be a dead branch. This is a warning to examine your heart and to repent if you find that you are falling away, or your heart is growing cold or your ears are dull. ***This might be the last warning you ever get!*** Repent of your sins and trust in Christ as your Savior!

In order to help us to bear fruit, God the Father *prunes* us. God the Father can work in many ways to keep us close to the *Vine*, to draw us into His Word, and to bear much fruit in our lives. He works through the Law of God to check our sin, and to lead us to repentance. He works through the Gospel to forgive our sins and comfort us through faith in Christ. God the Father can work through the difficulties that we face to strengthen our faith and bring us close to Jesus. God the Father can work through other people to encourage us, teach us, pray for us, and even to have difficult conversations with us if we need it. In this image, God the Father *prunes* you in love, so that you will not be cut off from the *Vine*; His Will and His Work in your life is that you **stay close to Jesus** the *True Vine*; that you hear, believe, and obey His Word; and that you bear much fruit.

This is how Jesus teaches us to think about ourselves: *every single thing about your life depends on Christ!* You are grafted into Him through faith! Without Him, you can do nothing.

Be sure to put yourself into this word picture: Jesus said, "**I AM** the **True Vine**, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . . **I AM** the **Vine**; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:1,2,5 Amen!