

THE MAN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD - PART 5

“I am the true vine”

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John 15:1-17

If I were to reduce to a single sentence everything the loving Father has laid upon my heart to say this morning, it would be this: “It takes Christ in us for us to be Christian.”

We all know it takes Christ in us to *become* Christian, but sometimes we forget it also takes Christ living, thinking, feeling and acting *in* us for us to *be* Christian.

Living Our Life As If Jesus Were Living It

The new life to which God has called us, a life of love, acceptance and forgiveness, is not the product of strained effort on our part to be and to live like Jesus. If that were true, we would all be struggling to emulate a first-century carpenter!

Rather, life in Christ is the result of a willingness on all our part, after we have invited Jesus to be our Savior, to allow Him to become our Lord! This frees Christ, through His indwelling Spirit—the Holy Spirit—to live His life through us. And we focus on living our life as if Jesus were living it.

Until you see this precious and fundamental truth, you will find the Christian life to be a most frustrating experience spawned by self-initiated striving after an impossible goal.

It is impossible for any human being to live the Christian life under his or her own power. It can't be done and was never meant to *be* done! To try it is to become engaged in an exercise in futility. All you and I can do is invite Christ to occupy us so we are truly alive, and then permit Him to take

charge of our entire personality so that little by little, more and more of His life is expressed through us.

The Difference Between The Vine And The Branches.

Our text is particularly helpful at this point because it draws a clear distinction between the nature and function of the Vine and the nature and function of the branches.

“I am the vine, ye are branches: He that abideth in me
and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for
without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Jesus is the vine or the source of life for the branches. As branches, our joyful function is to bear fruit. It is not our function to originate or initiate or produce the fruit of Christ-like living. That's the Vine's job. As branches, our sole responsibility is to bear the fruit which the Vine produces.

Jesus is the originator. He is the initiator. He is the producer of life and fruit. That's His function. As Christians, our role is to simply bear the fruit He produces in us as He lives His life through us.

The purpose of the fruit we are privileged to bear is to bless others. A vine in a vineyard does not bear its grapes for its own refreshment, but for the refreshment of others. So, too, Jesus—the True Vine—acts only and always for others.

This is one of the truths which became clear to me again this week while reading Roy Hesson's little book *We Would See Jesus*. And, I must say right now, I am indebted to Mr. Hesson for a number of the thoughts I want to share with you.

He points out that everything Jesus has ever done has been for others. When Jesus came from earth to heaven, it was for others. When Jesus laid down His life upon the cross, it was for others.

When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was to justify others as well as validate Himself and His claims.

“He was raised again for our justification”, Paul says in Romans 4:25.

Even the position Jesus occupies today as the Great High Priest in heaven is for the benefit of others (Heb. 9:24).

The focus of Christ's entire life and ministry, from start to finish, was and is others. Others. Always others.

And who are the undeserving others He seeks to serve? You and me! We are the others to whom He would minister.

But He not only wants to minister to us, He also wants to minister *through* us. He wants to get us connected up with Himself so that His life is flowing to us, and then He wants to involve us as extensions of Himself by having His life flow through us to others of the others He so longs to help and heal.

That's the picture of Himself, and us, Jesus draws here in John 15:5:

“I am the vine, ye are the branches.”

That means that as Christians, you and I have been made a part of the One who lives and acts for the salvation and blessing of others. It also means, therefore, that *we* exist for others. As branches our purpose is to bear the fruit which comes from the Vine, is characteristic of the Vine, and is produced by the Vine through us, for the blessing and benefit of others.

This may come as a complete surprise to you. Up until this very moment, you may have looked upon the Christian life as a wholly self-serving, self-saving affair in which God gives and you receive. Well, God does give! And you do receive! But only so you can pass the blessing you received on to others.

Comfort And Boldness

When you get that picture—when you see your true place in relationship to the person of Jesus—it

is a source of tremendous comfort as well as boldness.

I say it's a source of comfort because, despite your human weakness, frailty and susceptibility to sinful blight, Jesus is the Vine! He is the one who originates and initiates. He is the source of the power required to produce fruit. This should give you great comfort because the pressure is off. It should also infuse you with tremendous boldness as you move among needy, hungry desperate people for now you know that, as a branch of Jesus, you are that part of Him through which He will provide just the right kind of fruit which really satisfies the soul-hunger of those despairing people within arms reach of you.

Do you see the picture? Jesus is for others. You and I are among the desperate, needy, undeserving “others” to whom He wants to minister. So, He reaches out to us. He saves us. He heals us. He gives us His life. And then, indwelling us by His Holy Spirit, He makes us part of His life-giving system so as branches of Him...branches on which His fruit is born...we who have been blessed have the joy of becoming a blessing to others.

The wonderful thing about all this is that it happens without any struggle or strain on our part. It happens as the natural outworking of the life of Jesus within us. It isn't something we have to do on our own. Nor is it something we have to generate under our own power. It isn't ourselves we give to others. It is Jesus!

The source of our boldness, as fruit-bearing branches, is the absolute, fantastic fact that poor, weak, failure-prone folks like us are a source of limitless blessing to every life we touch because Jesus is bearing His fruit—

Love,

Joy,

Peace,

Patience

and all the rest—through us. And, He is doing so without stress, strain or struggle on our part.

To me, that's fantastic! We are not only blessed by being grafted into the Vine so we are truly alive with life everlasting but, we also have the joy of being a blessing. This means that every waking moment, every social contact, every relationship and friendship takes on a dimension of significance and meaning which is literally *out of this world!* It is eternal in scope.

As Christians, we are branches on which the fruit of Jesus' life is born. Isn't that wonderful!

“He (or she) that abideth in Me, and I in him (or her), the same bringeth forth much fruit...” (John 15:1,5).

It's as if Jesus is saying,

You don't have to struggle to be a Christian anymore. You don't have to be the Vine. That's My job. You only have to be a branch. You can't, and you aren't expected to, bear fruit on your own. To live the Christian life on your own. To be a blessing to others on your own. *I am the Vine.* You are a branch. Just let My life flow through you so the sweet and potent fruit of My spirit can be born by you.

Rightly understood, this is the best news you and I could possibly hear. It means Jesus doesn't expect us to be independent life givers. He doesn't even want us to try. The responsibility for producing fruit is not ours, it is His. Jesus is the vine. He produces the fruit. We are simply the fruit He produces and this happens as we live our life as if Jesus were living it.

The Two Pauls.

This throws wonderful new light on the words of Paul who said:

“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live” (Gal 2:20).

In essence, Paul was saying there are two Pauls. There is the Paul who tried to measure up to God's requirements on his own. That old Paul, the Paul who tried to be the Vine, who vainly tried to do his best for God in his own human strength, that Paul has been crucified with Christ.

But there is a second Paul. The Paul who now lives. Paul, the branch. Paul, who no longer maintains the illusion of indispensability or self-sufficiency and is quite willing, even eager, to be absolutely dependent upon Jesus.

“I am crucified with Christ”, said Paul, “nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me.”

Just as the vine lives in the branch through the upward, outward flow of life-giving sap so, too, Jesus the Vine lived through Paul, the branch, and became the source of all the fruit which was so evident in Paul's life.

The same principle applies to us. If we will allow our ego to be crucified with Christ, the old egocentric self will gradually fade away. Christ will live in us. And produce His fruit through us. And we will have the joy of bearing the fruit He produces.

This suggests three things. First, if we are dissatisfied and discouraged with the way our Christian life is going,

We Must Look By Faith To Jesus As The Vine.

Jesus is never discouraged. Never defeated. Never depressed. Never at a loss to meet the needs about Him. Jesus is the true Vine, which is to say: He is the source of Life and He is the supplier of the power required to live the true Christian life.

Our weakness and emptiness do not hinder Him. In fact, they give Him an even greater chance to prove His wonderful sufficiency. It is a simple fact, you see, that we must be emptied before we filled. We must be broken before we can be healed. We must be killed (that is, our ego must die) before we can be made alive.

It is our extremity which is God's opportunity. And, if by faith, we will look to Jesus, the True Vine into which we have been grafted and from which we receive all of everything we need to live a truly

Christian life effectively and victoriously, then a new boldness, confidence and assurance in fruit-bearing will spring up within us. For His life will more completely flows through us.

We Must Quickly Repent Of Trying To Be The Vine.

Second, there must be a willingness and readiness on our part to be sensitized by the Holy Spirit so we quickly become aware of those times when, even unconsciously, we try to be the vine.

This is a big problem for me. It's easy for me to want and try to meet the needs of others under my own power. I'm learning, the hard way, it just won't work.

It's easy to awaken each morning and make our plans to do our best to be Jesus. But by trying to be the Vine, we wind up tense, frustrated, dead tired, fruitless branches.

The only solution is confession and repentance. Each time we get our roles confused, we must learn to meet Jesus where we met Him the first time—at the cross. The True Vine, like every ordinary vine, has been tied to a stake. The stake of Calvary. He invites us to return to Him there where, in confession and repentance, we turn away from anything and everything which makes us feel—even for a moment—we can get along without Him including satan's subtle lie that we *should* get along without Him.

The instant we turn to Him at Calvary, He becomes the Vine for us again. We become a branch which has life in it. His life. And thus, the very place of our failure becomes a place of fruit-bearing, through Jesus, for others. Excuse me, but Hallelujah!

Abiding Is A Two-way Street.

The third thought I want to share is that “abiding” is a two way street. Jesus said,

“Abide in Me, *and* I in you” (John 15:4).

It's a two way street you see. Often we hear someone say,

“The secret of the Christian life is to abide in Jesus.”

Well, that's half-true, and a dangerous half-truth at that. It gives the impression that we are to somehow strive to “abide in Jesus” in a kind of grim, set-jawed, teeth-gritting, self-help endeavor. No. No. NO!

The real secret of victory and joy in the Christian life is realizing “abiding is a two way street.” God has put us in His son. He has united us to Jesus as a branch is united to a vine. All we have to do is stay where God put us so Jesus can abide in us.

That doesn't take any effort. The effort comes in trying to break away from the Vine! If we just stay in the place God put us at the moment of our conversion, then the life of the Vine abides in us and Jesus provides all we need for continued growth and fruit-bearing.

To abide means to dwell, or remain, or continue. So Jesus is saying to us today:

Dwell in Me!...remain in Me...continue in Me...stay
where my Father put you. In Me! *Abide* in Me so I
can dwell, remain and continue to abide in you.

If you *will* dwell in Me, I *can* dwell in you. And the
Life which is in Me, I will release to you and through
you. As a result your life, like mine, will be fruitful
and joyful. Abide in Me and I in you. It's a two way
street.

And what's the purpose of all this? I remind you of what was said when we began: Jesus is for others, and we must be for others. As a matter of fact, we only find true meaning and joy as Christians by serving others.

But wonder of wonders, as we give, we get. As His life pours out of us, He pours His life into us. And the amount of His life and joy we receive is in direct proportion to the amount of His life and

joy we give.

It comes down to this then. If you want more of the joy of Jesus, give more of the joy of Jesus away.

“I am The True Vine. You are the branches. If you abide in Me, and I in you, you shall bring forth much fruit—and your joy shall be full.”