

John 15:1-5 – “I Am the True Vine”

(Pew Bible Page: 901)

Intro: The long history of God’s revelation of Himself to Man runs directly through the Jewish nation. Israel has always been central to God’s work on earth. Abraham was chosen by God to become the father of many nations. Moses recorded God’s revelation of Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and the Exodus. The stories of Joshua, the Judges, prophets, priests, kings, and sacrifices all come to us through the nation of Israel. Even our Savior came from the tribe of Judah. With a few exceptions, Scripture is almost entirely given to us through Jewish hands. And yet, when Jesus said, “*I am the true vine,*” He set the nation aside, admitting its failure, and proclaimed that He had come to fulfill for God all that Israel had forsaken. Jesus initiated a New Covenant with a new people that continues to this day. Tonight, we’ll look at what this new nation looks like and learn that...

Proposition: Jesus is the True Vine and we His followers are the true branches.

Billboard:	(v.1)	The Vine and the Vinedresser
	(v.2)	The Trouble with Branches
	(v.3)	The True Branches
	(vv.4-5)	The Secret of Fruitfulness

(v.1) The Vine and the Vinedresser – Jesus began this part of His discourse with the striking words, **John 15:1–2 - 1** “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*” What did He mean by this? The nation of Israel was often pictured in the Old Testament as a vine planted, tended, and cherished by God. Israel was beloved of God, and He sought “fruit” from His cherished people – faithfulness, gratitude, and godliness. But Israel had not been faithful. Many times, she had rebelled against God, committing terrible acts of unfaithfulness which God compared to “wild grapes” that were of no use as fruit to the vineyard owner. Jesus now said, “*I am the true vine,*” the real Israel of God. In saying this Jesus represented Himself as the “completion and fulfillment of Israel.”¹ God had sought a people taken from the world for the purpose of “glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever,” but Israel had refused, insisting on following their own fallen hearts rather than relying on God’s revelation of Himself. So, Jesus had come to *complete the mission* the nation had rejected; He had come to *fulfill the purpose* of God that Israel turned away from. By God’s design, Jesus is now the rootstock of all humanity called out of the world and set apart for God’s glory. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, the foundation upon which all who believe build their lives. Jesus is “*the true vine.*”

The final words of verse one tells us that His Father is “*the vinedresser.*” A vinedresser in first century Judea had the responsibility of caring for the vines and making them as fruitful as possible. A vinedresser would know His vineyard intimately, understanding what each branch needed to make it grow the maximum quantity and the highest quality of fruit. Vinedressers would prune fruitful branches skillfully, knowing just where to cut, how much to trim, and even precise angles of cutting that needed to be made, all designed to make sure that the finest fruit

¹ Lexham Bible Dictionary

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possible was produced by each branch on the vine. And if branches didn't produce fruit, the vinedresser had no hesitation in cutting them off entirely. All this is pictured by Jesus in verse two, where He tells us that there are two kinds of branches on the vine.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus came to fulfill all faithfulness the nation of Israel forsook. The Father watches over His people to insure maximum fruitfulness.

(v.2) The Trouble with Branches – Since Jesus is the Vine, it would seem inevitable that fruitfulness would always result, but this is not so as we are told in verse 2: **John 15:2 - 2** *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.* The verse tells us that there are two conditions of branches in Jesus, the True Vine. One kind of branch bears no fruit for the Master, while the second kind of branch is fruitful. These branches obviously represent professing believers, and this takes us immediately back in our minds to Jesus' Parable of the Soils where this same condition was described (cf. Mt. 13). You will recall from our study there that there are various conditions of heart among those who profess to follow Jesus. The second kind of heart described gives up on Jesus when times get tough. The third neglects Jesus for the things of this world. The only type of heart that is a true heart is the fourth kind of heart, which produces fruit for the Master in increasing abundance.

Let's examine what Jesus meant by “fruit.” In His earthly ministry Jesus associated “fruit” with the coming of the kingdom. As we look into the gospels, we find Jesus saying in Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:18, “**Matthew 26:29 - 29** *I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*” The fruit being produced, then, is for the coming kingdom. Jesus is seeking “branches,” believers in other words, who will bear His likeness; who are Godly; who are submissive to God the Father; who are faithful even unto death, as was Jesus Himself. Jesus endured in the face of persecution. He did not abandon His mission. Those are the kinds of believers that the Father is seeking; these are the kinds of people who will enjoy life with Him in His kingdom. These fruitful branches yield the fruit of the Spirit in increasingly Christ-like lives. When the Father finds them, He prunes them – nurtures them into greater fruitfulness. But when He encounters fruitless branches, He cuts them off, as we can see below in verse 6. What is being discussed here is faithfulness as opposed to apostasy.

Apostasy refers to some who seem to place their faith in Jesus, but later turn their backs on Him. They do not endure to the end. Some people think that these people were saved but later lost their salvation, but that can't be true because the Bible is clear that once an individual is united with Christ through faith, he or she is sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of final salvation. So those who apostatize are people who profess faith in Christ, but never actually receive Him as their Lord and Savior. These people have false faith, or what John Calvin referred to as “temporary faith.” True faith endures; false faith or temporary faith does not. This is why Jesus raises the question of apostasy in verse 6 and discusses the need to abide in Him in verses 4-5. But first we turn to verse 3.

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[DOCTRINAL POINT] Not all “branches” are true branches.

(v.3) True Branches – Having noted that there are two kinds of believers, Jesus clarified the difference between the two when He said: **John 15:3 - 3** *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.* How does one become a true branch? Jesus tells us in verse 3 that we become truly His by being washed clean by the word He has spoken to us. What does this mean? This is simply referring to putting our faith in Christ. When we trust and obey what He says to us, that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that He was buried; that He was raised again from the dead according to the Scriptures – when this is believed and relied upon, we are washed clean. All our sins are forgiven, and God the Father seals our hearts for final salvation by sending the Holy Spirit to indwell those who believe. Jesus said to His disciples, *“Already you are clean,”* Judas having already departed from His presence. Judas was one of those fruitless branches, but the other eleven were true believers, so Jesus said to them, *“Already you are clean.”* That answers the question of how one becomes a true branch, but how does a true branch become fruitful? We’ll see that next in verses 4-5.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] True believers are those who trust and obey Jesus.

(vv.4-5) The Secret of Fruitfulness – Jesus reveals to us the secret of fruitfulness in seven words: **John 15:4 - 4** *Abide in me, and I in you.* When we study Scripture, we should always be on the lookout for statements that are indicative, and those which are imperative. Indicative statements tell us the facts; imperative statements tell us what to do with those facts. John 15:1-5 is filled with indicative statements: Jesus is the True Vine, the Father is the Vinedresser, there are two kinds of branches, branches become branches through faith, etc. In the seven words that begin verse 4 we have the only imperative – the only command in the entire passage. Imperatives always follow indicatives because facts always precede actions. In this imperative, Jesus reveals the secret of fruitfulness: *“Abide in me, and I in you.”* What is meant by *“abide”*? It is not complex. It simply means that we continue putting our faith in Jesus. We *became* branches by trusting and obeying Him and we *continue* as branches by trusting and obeying Him.

Those who abide stay in living union with Christ, the true vine. Union with Christ means enduring in the faith and continually drawing life from the vine. In other words, you stay put in Jesus. Fruit bearing is the natural consequence of this abiding. Jesus makes it clear in verse 4 that anyone who doesn’t abide in Him cannot possibly bear fruit: *As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.* He reiterates the point in verse 5: **John 15:5 - 5** *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.* Those who abide in Him bear much fruit because of the skillful art of the Vinedresser. *“Apart from me,”* He said, *“You can do nothing.”* So, the secret to bearing fruit is simply this: stay close to Jesus. The bearing of fruit, which is the evidence of true union with Christ, is a natural and inevitable consequence of our union with Jesus through the coming of the Holy Spirit into the believer’s life.

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[DOCTRINAL POINT] The secret of fruitfulness is to abide in Jesus by continuing to trust and obey Him.

[APPLICATION] So, what are the lessons we can take away from these truths? What difference does it make that we know these things?

First, knowing that abiding in Christ is the source of any fruitfulness in our lives helps us enormously to turn our efforts at holiness in the right direction. If abiding in Him is the secret to fruitfulness, the secret to a changed life that looks progressively like the character of Jesus, knowing this should help us to abandon our persistent, fleshly efforts to create our own righteousness. Stop working yourself to death trying to impress God! Just draw near to the vine and stay there. Fruitfulness will naturally follow, produced by the divine Vinedresser Himself. How do we invite this? Meditate on His word. Talk to Him in prayer. Obey His commandments. It's not rocket science! Abide.

Secondly, realize that not everyone who claims to know Him, truly knows Him. This can help us in two ways. First, it explains much of what we see around us in professing Christianity. Some folks who call themselves Christians seem bound and determined to embarrass Christ and His Church at every turn in the road. While you and I can't know with certainty who's real and who's not, it is still helpful to bear in mind that some of what goes on in Jesus' name is sheer poppycock. Secondly, knowing this is a call to helpfulness in the Body of Christ. If some around us have yet to come to Christ, shouldn't that encourage us to make doubly certain that everyone gets every help we can give them in perseverance? Perseverance is often the key to winning people to true faith. It happens all the time! People hang around church forever, and then one day they get saved. Let's make it our business to help the ones we're dubious about, hang in there. Lightning may yet strike if it hasn't already!

Finally, we need to insist on discussing the full truth of Scripture with everyone we know. It's far too easy for us to assume that everyone who comes to church is a believer, and to water down our conversations and teachings. Maybe the old Russian proverb Ronald Reagan was so fond of should be kept at least in the back of our minds: "Trust but verify!"

Conclusion: Jesus is the True Vine and those who trust and obey Him are the True Branches. A true branch will inevitably bear fruit. That fruit may be nothing more than a mere bud at first, but under the skillful care of the Vinedresser, increasing likeness to Christ will certainly follow.