

# SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**JOHN 15:1** I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

**2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.**

**3** Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

**4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.**

**5** I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me,

and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

**6** If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

**7** If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

**8** Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

## NOTES

# Abide in the True Vine

Lesson Text: John 15:1-8

Related Scriptures: John 15:9-17; Romans 11:11-21;  
Matthew 7:15-20

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"I am the vine, ye are the 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).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **THE VINEDRESSER—John 15:1-3**

**The true vine (John 15:1).** Over the last few lessons, Jesus has been relating His final instructions to the apostles in the upper room prior to His arrest.

That Jesus begins this section with "I am" is noteworthy. This is the eighth and final time in John's Gospel that Christ has used this expression to identify Himself. Previously, He had said, "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "Before Abraham was, I am," "I am the door of the sheep," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the resurrection, and the life," and "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (6:35; 8:12, 58; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6).

By using these various "I am" statements, Christ was actually identifying Himself as Yahweh, the Lord—the very God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6).

When Jesus speaks metaphorically of Himself as "the true vine," He is identifying Himself as the true Israel personified. One of the most famous Old Testament parables using the vine imagery is found in Isaiah 5:1-7. There, Israel is called "the vineyard of the

Lord of hosts" (vs. 7).

In John 15, Christ is "presented as the true Israel, the genuine vine, the man of God's right hand" (Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, Eerdmans). The Heavenly Father is identified with the "husbandman," the Vinedresser who cares for the vineyard. Unlike most seasonal crops that sprout quickly after planting, vineyards require many seasons to develop.

**True disciples (John 15:2-3).** As those who work with trees and vines know, if a branch bears no fruit, it needs to be removed, since it uses resources that would otherwise be devoted to fruit-bearing branches. If a branch *is* bearing fruit, then pruning—thinning some of it away—is necessary. This maximizes the productivity of the vine by channeling its resources toward producing increased fruit rather than majoring on leaves.

When we come to Christ, we do so as spiritual babes (cf. I Cor. 3:1-3). Some converts mature spiritually sooner than others. Sadly, some seem to remain stuck in spiritual babyhood, hardly moving beyond an elementary knowl-

edge and application of the Christian faith (cf. Heb. 5:11—6:3). For those who do mature, however, it is important to continue maturing. We should never be content to remain where we are. Continued progress invariably includes “pruning” in the form of trials, sacrifices, and tribulations.

The eleven remaining disciples in the upper room were clean (John 15:3) by the word of Christ. They had listened to Him, believed Him, and obeyed His teachings. But Judas Iscariot, now absent, was unclean (cf. 13:10-11), meaning that he was a false disciple.

There are those who profess faith in Christ who do not really possess genuine faith in Him. Faith indeed comes through hearing the Word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17), but genuine faith will always be manifested through good works (cf. Jas. 2:14-26). Maturing in our faith is vital to both spiritual growth and our personal assurance of salvation (cf. II Pet. 1:5-11).

#### **ABIDING IN THE VINE—John 15:4-5**

The word translated “abide” appears over one hundred times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospel of John and in I John. It is sometimes used in a physical sense, of remaining or staying in a certain place (cf. John 1:38). But it is also used in a spiritual sense, as it is here in John 15.

There is, of course, a sense in which Christ is holding on to us, as when He said concerning His sheep, “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (10:28). But at the same time, we must hold on to Him, that is, abide in Him. He also abides, or remains, in us.

In short, following Christ is a two-way street. True, both our decision to come to Christ and our ability to remain in Him depend on divine initiative and power. But this does not nullify our responsibility to persevere in the faith. We are not merely coasting to heaven. We are pressing on (cf. Phil.

3:14), running a race (cf. Heb. 12:1). As great a man of God as he was, Paul refused to presume upon God’s saving grace (I Cor. 9:27).

A branch that is severed from its tree or vine is thereby cut off from the nutrients that produce fruit. To abide in Christ means to remain spiritually connected to Christ. Otherwise, no fruit can be produced.

Although Jesus was speaking to His chosen apostles when He said, “Ye are the branches” (John 15:5), this applies to all followers of Christ, both ancient and modern.

Among other things, abiding in Christ makes it possible for the believer to bring forth “much fruit.” This includes those qualities that make up the fruit of the Spirit, but it also certainly includes leading others to Christ.

When Jesus said, “Without me ye can do nothing,” He was not talking about secular activities. Even people who do not believe in God can accomplish many things in the world. But from the standpoint of that which has eternal value and significance, only what we do for Christ truly matters, and for that we need Him. As missionary C. T. Studd famously said, “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past; Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

#### **A WARNING AND A PROMISE— John 15:6-8**

**Dead branches burned (John 15:6).** Just as a branch that does not remain connected to a rooted tree will wither and die, so it is with those who are alienated from Christ. Such dead branches are good for nothing but to be gathered and burned. While fire is sometimes used as a symbol for purification from sin (cf. Isa. 6:5-7), it is most often used as a symbol of judgment and destruction, both in the Old Testament (cf. Ezek. 15:1-8) and in the New (cf. Matt. 13:36-43).

While polls indicate that more peo-

ple believe in heaven than in hell, if we take the Bible seriously, especially the teachings of Jesus, we must conclude that a fiery judgment awaits unbelievers (Rev. 20:12-15; 21:8). Many who profess faith are nevertheless among the lost. As Christ pointed out, even the ability to prophesy, exorcise demons, and perform miracles is no guarantee that a person is a true believer (Matt. 7:21-23). Jesus was not speaking of people losing their salvation either, since He said to them, "I *never* knew you" (vs. 23, emphasis added). The Lord chooses His words carefully, and He means what He says! The reality that we cannot be taken from the Lord's hand (John 10:28), that nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:38-39), and that God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 1:24), should not lead us to presumption concerning our salvation. New Testament exhortations to faithfulness and obedience are not superfluous. The prospects of spiritual ruin, a destroyed testimony, and uselessness for God's kingdom work are real and catastrophic. To make light of such things is to play into the devil's hands. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

**God's glory magnified (John 15:7-8).** Jesus promised that the prayers of those who remained steadfastly in Him would always be answered. Although God answers all prayers with either yes, no, or wait, keep in mind that this promise was originally spoken to Jesus' apostles. How and when their prayers were answered may differ from how God answers ours. Other passages, however, assure us that God's people can expect to be heard by our Heavenly Father.

We should not take this to mean that everything we pray for will be automatically granted. It is common for

even Christians to pray amiss and for the wrong things.

As it was with Jesus, our words and works should be for the purpose of glorifying God. One way to bring glory to God is to "bear much fruit" (vs. 8). In this way, we show that we are true disciples of Christ. A fruitless disciple is an oxymoron, a self-contradiction.

Bearing fruit is reflected in our willingness to keep His commandments (vs. 10) and to love one another (vs. 12). Whether dealing with the original apostles or modern-day disciples, this does not mean it will be easy to live the Christian life. As the world hated Christ, so it will always hate His followers (vs. 18).

—John Alva Owston.

## QUESTIONS

1. What was Jesus' point in the various "I am" statements found in John?
2. What did Jesus mean when He referred to Himself as "the true vine?"
3. What must be done to a branch on the vine that does not bear fruit?
4. What does pruning accomplish in branches that do bear fruit?
5. What does it mean to abide in Christ?
6. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Without me ye can do nothing?"
7. What is the significance of the burning of dead branches?
8. Why does the New Testament exhort us so strongly to faithfulness and obedience?
9. What promise did Jesus make about prayer?
10. What is a prime way we can bring glory to God?

—John Alva Owston.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

## Golden Text Illuminated

1. True life is in Jesus, and it is given to us by the Father (John 15:1).
2. Those who belong to God have a responsibility to proclaim who He is (vss. 2-3).
3. We cannot bear fruit for God if we are living apart from Christ (vss. 4-5).
4. Every Christian should make a positive impact on the world for the gospel (vs. 6).
5. Abiding in Christ is an important key to answered prayer (vs. 7).
6. Our desire should be to accomplish as much for the Lord as possible (vs. 8).

—Charity G. Carter.

**“I am the vine, ye are the 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 lifts a metaphor from the pages of Isaiah and calls Himself “the Vine.” Israel, according to Isaiah, was God’s vineyard, and Judah was His favorite plant, though both were failing to bear fruit (Isa. 5:7). In light of this, Jesus remarkably calls Himself the “true vine” (John 15:1).

He then calls His eleven disciples (Judas is excluded) “the branches.” They, of course, represent all who put their faith in Him, Jews or Gentiles.

After Jesus’ blaze of rhetoric is complete, He explains what a person must do to bear fruit and keep safe. The person must remain “in” Jesus, and herein lies the text’s mystery: what does that mean?

Further down the page in John 15, we read that abiding in Jesus is associated with letting His words abide in us (vs. 7). We also read that He gives “commandments” that we must “keep” (vs. 10).

John 15:12, however, defines Jesus’ commandments as primarily a single commandment: “Love one another, as I have loved you.”

But this naturally raises the question of our source of power to do this. The golden text makes it clear: “Without me ye can do nothing.” It is only by abiding in the Vine that we are able to love in this way. In other words, this love is the consequence of faith, which truly allows us to abide in Him.

—David Samuel Gifford.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How can the knowledge that Jesus is the Vine give us confidence and security (John 15:1)?
2. Why are branches that do not bear fruit taken away while branches that do bear fruit are pruned (vs. 2)?
3. Abiding in Christ means to remain in Him (vs. 4). How can we abide in Christ?
4. Why are we unable to bear fruit if we do not abide in Christ (vs. 5)?
5. Abiding in Christ is a command rather than a suggestion. What are some consequences for not abiding in Christ (vs. 6)?
6. What does it mean to “bear much fruit” (vs. 8)?

—Charity G. Carter.