



The Fruit of Abiding

Message Notes, September 18, 2016

John 15:1-17

These weeks, we have been with Jesus and his disciples in the “upper room. In this John 15 passage, Jesus shifts his teaching to the most profound analogy of our life as followers of Jesus: The Vine and the Branches.

Examining the Metaphor

I. The Vine

- Vineyards were a very familiar part of life in that region.
- Also, the Hebrew people understood themselves to be the “Vineyard of God,” revealing Him in the world. When Jesus states that he is the “true” vine, he is not invalidating this vineyard identity of Israel. He is simply expressing that He is the original, genuine vine to which the Hebrew nation symbolically points.
- Most importantly – Jesus is stating that He is the source of life. The life force for all attached to Him.

II. The Branches

- Completely dependent on the vine for nourishment and life.
- Branches don’t strive to produce fruit; they stay connected to the Vine. The nourishment and life of the vine produce fruit on the branches. Their fruit is truly the *fruit* of “abiding in the vine.”
- Jesus uses the word “abide” 11 times in these eight verses (1-8). What does it actually mean to “abide”?
 - a) Passive side of abiding – is an attitude of heart, a recognition of our need, a posture of surrender.
 - b) Active side of abiding - is a choice. We actively *engage*. We must intentionally take advantage of the “means of grace” God has given to help us stay connected to him: Prayer, scripture, worship, community, thanksgiving, confession, fasting, and many more. These spiritual disciplines are channels that open up the flow of the Holy Spirit in our everyday lives. They allow the life of Jesus to flow and flourish in our lives in all that we think and do and everywhere we go.

III. The Gardener

- Jesus makes it clear that we branches need tending, and his Father is the gardener, our *tenderer*.
- Our Gardener Father tends us in two primary ways:
 - a) He “cuts off” things in our lives that are dry, dead and destructive. In short, he wants to cut sin out of our lives. This cutting is motivated by love, and its purpose is to bring healing and wholeness into our lives.
 - b) He “prunes” living, even good, things that may be distracting us from his best, from his greater purposes in and through our lives. Like the fruitless “sucker” branches on a tomato plant that draw nourishment away from the healthier, fruitful branches. These “suckers” need to be pruned away.
- Sometimes He just cuts and prunes away, without our permission, but often he brings things to our attention (via conviction or inspiration) that He longs to cut or prune as we willingly surrender these to Him.

Two critical questions arise from this Vine/Branches analogy:

1. What does it mean to say, “Apart from me, you can do nothing”? For surely people, even non-believers, do and accomplish many good things in this world.
 - The context of Jesus’ full discourse is important here. Looking back in chapter 14, we see his words about the Holy Spirit coming to “be within us.” By Him, we will do “even greater things” (wider impact) than Jesus.
 - Jesus is saying, “If you abide in me, your life will be filled with my *Presence*, your character will be rooted in my *Purity*, and what you do will be fueled by my *Power*. If you do not abide in me, your life will not be anointed by my Spirit; you will live out of your own limited, flawed, human resources.”
2. What is this fruit (we will bear)? Again, the context is important here. We must read on past verse 8. Jesus goes on to describe this “fruit that the Father desires us to bear.” In short – it is love.
 - Jesus is calling us to abide in his love – to embrace his deep love for us, to love him through joyful obedience, and to love each other - as he has loved us.
 - Love is the first fruit, not just sequentially, but in priority.
 - Love is the foundational fruit. All other fruits Holy Spirit cultivates in our lives sprout from the soil of Love.
 - At the recent Blanchard Leadership Conference (a business conference), one of the central messages was that leadership is about love. *Loving* people bears more fruit in the business world than *managing* people.

Reflection Questions

1. Are there dead things in your life God desires to “cut off”?
2. What tangible step of response might he be calling you to in this “cutting” process (e.g., confession, meeting with a pastor or counselor, pursuing a recovery group, etc.)?
3. Are there any benign or even good things in your life God is asking you to surrender to his pruning?
4. Are there spiritual disciplines you need to pursue in your life that would help you abide in Jesus, your vine?
5. Are you striving to produce fruit out of your own determined efforts or are you focused on abiding in Jesus so he can cultivate his fruit in you?
6. Do you feel challenged in this priority call to love:
 - Surrendering more fully to God’s love for you
 - Being more mindful and intentional of loving Him through joyful obedience
 - Committing your heart and mind to more fully loving those around you (spouse, children, family, co-workers, friends, neighbors ...)