

“Glory: The Goal of Bearing Fruit”
John 15:1-8

“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. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 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. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

If you were with us last week, or if you weren't, Tommy preached on “Jesus, The Good Shepherd.” As he's been weaving his way through the book of John, we've seen many places where Jesus refers to Himself in some metaphorical way. Previously Jesus has referred to Himself as:

- The true temple (John 2)
- The true water – the water of eternal life (John 4)
- The true bread from heaven (John 6)
- The light of the world (John 8)
- The truth that sets us free (John 8)
- The door (John 10)
- The life that resurrects men from the dead (John 11)
- The way, the truth and the life (John 14)

...and last week, the good shepherd. Now, we come to another narrative section where Jesus reveals more about Who He really is: the true vine.

As we read this passage, we can get the impression that the main point is about fruit. However, as we look at this today, I pray that you'll see there is a deeper purpose that frames the discussion about fruit, an overarching goal that is wrapped around the vine, the branch, the cutting off, the pruning, and the fruit.

The truth of this metaphor is that the fruit has a purpose, and that purpose is the glory of God through Jesus, the true vine!

1. Recognizing the True Vine

A little bit of history... in the Old Testament, the metaphor of the vine was used to refer to Israel, God's chosen people. You might think that sounds fine. Vines are good, right? Grapes are good! Raisins are good! Wine...

...thought I was going to say good, didn't you?

The problem is that where the Bible refers to Israel as the vine—as God's vine—it is very clear that God's vine is disobedient, wild, and unfruitful.

Pretend you're in Israel. It's about 33 AD. The weather forecast for today is sunny with scattered sun, and a chance for more sun later (just like Seattle...). The traffic report indicates that there was an accident on Main Street, involving two carts and some oxen. Fortunately the airbags went off in time, and no one was injured. Although, it may be hard to find a dealer to fix the carts - apparently they were Chryslers.

If you were within earshot of Jesus speaking to the 11 disciples, and you heard Jesus say, “I am the true vine,” you might have had this reaction:

"Really? That's great! We've been waiting for a leader! As God's vine we haven't done so well so far, so it's about time He sent us a leader so we can be a fruitful vine!"

"Well, hold on...the true vine...? The perfect fulfillment of the vine? The good vine, planted in love, tended with care from the master vinedresser, and cultivated to produce bushels and bushels of sweet juicy fruit? THAT vine? That's you?"

"Whoa!"

It is against this concept of Israel as the wild, fruitless vine, Jesus declares to be the TRUE vine; the original, uncorrupted, genuine expression of all that Israel was to be. To be clear, it's not enough to say that Jesus is the 3-D original in millions of colors, and Israel is the black and white photocopy. Israel was the cracked and corroded surface of an old mirror covered by

a sheet in the attic, that does not reflect the light, Jesus is the light that outshines the sun!

You may have studied the Bible for decades, or you may never have cracked its cover in your entire life. Either way you may have a concept of Jesus as our good example, a model for us to follow. Consider what Jesus says about Himself here. If He wanted to communicate that He was the model for us to follow wouldn't He have said, "I am the good BRANCH"? There is a world of difference between claiming to be a model branch, and the vine from which all branches derive their sustenance.

And the church today? The new Israel? On its own, it produces NOTHING! We're no different. We have no ability to produce fruit! And here is the tension: we MUST bear fruit. You and I - ALL people MUST BEAR FRUIT - lest we be cut off and gathered and burned. There is a way, one way, for us to bear much fruit and glorify God. And that brings us to point two.

2. *All About branches*

Look at verse 2,

"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that bears fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

I love Jesus. I'm like Him, you know...we both like to group things together!

On my workbench in the garage, I have one of those little organizers to keep all of my fasteners straightened. Machine screws in this one, wood screws in that one, washers here, nuts and bolts there. I recently re-organized it. I like things tidy...a place for everything, and everything in its place. I know. Tommy's trying to figure out what obsessive compulsive disorder medicine to get me to try...as long as I can organize the medicines...then okay.

Through much of the New Testament we see Jesus addressing people in groups.

Sheep and goats

Wheat and weeds

Pharisees and tax collectors

And here fruit and no-fruit.

Nice neat groups. Here Jesus sets up two groups: does not bear fruit and bears fruit. At first glance these groups can appear very similar.

Similarities:

They both look like branches.

They both feel the vinedresser's knife.

They are both subject to the will of the vinedresser.

But Jesus tells us the key difference...the point of fact that means life or death. Just one: Some bear fruit...some do not. The goal of the vine and the branches are to bear fruit for the vinedresser. That's the only reason for planting them. The only reason they exist. Whom do the branches represent?

Non-fruit bearing: Those whose lives do not reflect and consist of continuing attachment to Jesus. Very similar to the concept that faith without works is dead faith.

Fruit bearing: Those whose lives DO reflect and consist of vigorous continuous attachment to Jesus. It is accurate to say that the fruit bearing branches represent the heirs of the covenant, the true people of God.

What does the Bible say about those who are fruitless?

Inside of the group that bears no fruit are two subgroups. It's important for you to recognize this, since this is modeled by Jesus in how He addressed those who were not His followers. Basically, there are two ways you can avoid Jesus. We see this clearly in the main groups Jesus addressed—Pharisees, the tax collectors, and sinners—and we, I'm sure, have those same two groups represented here today. You look different and have different names, but see if this sounds like you:

Group 1. Some may hear this sermon and think "I have no interest in bearing fruit for God. I just want to enjoy life, make lots of money, go on vacations, watch TV, play video games, spend time on Facebook or Twitter...do anything and everything I can to serve my own desires." Parallel in Jesus' day: tax collector and "sinner."

Group 2. Others may say "I go to church; I'm even a member! I keep the ten commandments, I'm nice to my friends, I do anything and everything to be good." You may consider yourself a lot more fruitful than that first group" Parallel in Jesus' day: Pharisee.

The first group, the tax collectors, sinners—Jesus went to them. He spent time with them. He sought them out to bring light to their eyes, truth to their ears, and life to their souls. The scariest Bible passage for this group may be a tie between,

***“Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me...” Matt. 16:24, and
...go, sell what you possess and give to the poor...follow me” Matt. 19:21***

The second group, the Pharisees, sought Jesus out, but not in submission to Him as the Son of God. They sought to trap Him with their laws, to limit His growing influence, to discredit and kill Him. Many people who claim to be Christians, go to church, and actually do work for Jesus are in this group and don't know it. The scariest Bible passage for this group would have to be Matthew 7:21-23:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

The reality is that you could be in either one of these groups and be faced with the same thing. If you are not continually attached to and abiding in Jesus, you are fruitless. Apart from Him, you can do nothing! Nothing! Not, you cannot achieve your potential; you won't have your best life. Jesus is not giving a seminar on how to have a fruitful life. He is defining a fruitful life!

Jesus points to Himself and says, “I am the vine to which you must be continually attached in order to bear fruit.” All people are to abide in Christ, to rest in His finished work. But we don't! We attach ourselves to things that are not Christ.

What of the branches that bear fruit?

Consider the work of the vinedresser on the branches that bear fruit. God is merciful to prune those who bear fruit. He watches closely to see that they bear as much fruit as they can and prunes them to that end. All branches feel the cut of the knife and bleed as its edge slices away that which diverts our growth. We wince at the pain caused by our Father as he removes competing desires. He is a jealous God, and He removes anything that competes for the fruit that glorifies Him.

Some commentators believe that the language of verse two is properly translated “lifts up” and cleans or cleanses, such that the vinedresser would lift up the vine and clean it off, giving it better access to sunlight and opportunity to bear fruit. They have in mind the idea that God, the vinedresser, loves us all, and desires all to be saved – and that is TRUE! However, we need to give the vinedresser more credit.

When I'm out and about in the back yard, I may come across some plant that has no leaves, no new shoots, no flowers, no signs of life. In my early years of marriage I removed these, thinking I was helping Joy with keeping up with the yard. Unlike God, I am not a master gardener; I didn't know that some plants HIBERNATE IN THE WINTER. It looked dead to me, so out it came!

God the Father is the true vinedresser. He knows how to cultivate the vine; He knows what is best for the production of fruit. He knows the difference between a branch that should have been bearing fruit long ago, but isn't, and one that needs to be pruned. Simply stated, when the goal is the production of much fruit from the vine as a whole, the act of cutting off the unproductive branches is in the best interest of the vine and vinedresser. So we have vinedresser, vine, branches—what about the fruit?

3. Bearing Fruit

What is fruit?

Being good.
Obeying the 10 commandments.
Growing in the Fruit of the spirit
Coming to church regularly – or at all.
Attending Sunday school – you should do that...really.
Participating in a small group – you should do that, too...really!
Bringing others to Christ.

Loving your fellow believers.
Serving in children's ministry.
Being a Deacon, or Elder.
Preaching A SERMON?

To discard any of these things as “not fruit” is to discard much of the teaching of the Bible and is most likely a ploy, either consciously or unconsciously, to avoid the full scope of what it means to worship Christ. We cannot say that obedience to Christ is not fruit, since we know that unless we are attached to Him we cannot obey His commands. We cannot say that the fruit of the spirit is not fruit, since the Bible is so clear on that point. Similarly, we cannot say that bringing others to Christ, or evangelism, or love for fellow Christians are not fruit, as these are all addressed by Jesus as central elements of what it means to follow Him.

Fruit is nothing less than the total of the Bible's teaching on what it means to be Jesus' follower and disciple.

In verses 4 through 8 Jesus clarifies the requirement for bearing fruit:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 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. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

The clear message Jesus has for us here is ABIDE. The language here can also mean remain or continue.

I had a friend who had a very strong objection to the idea that someone could become a Christian simply by believing in Jesus. “That's too easy!” he said. On one hand he's right. The message of Jesus may very well knock you off your seat of pride to fall crashing at the feet of Jesus, asking Him, begging Him, to bear the burdens that would crush your soul. How hard is falling?

On the other hand, the end of this passage should cause you to feel uneasy. Have you been a Christian for a long time? Does your fruit prove that you are His?

Abiding in Jesus is complete submission to all of His commands, to all of His word, and all of Him, for all of your days. If you don't recognize and embrace the idea that Jesus has full authority over every area of your life, both now and forever, you may very well not be a Christian.

But to what end? What is the goal of bearing fruit? Take another look at verse 8.

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

Fruit is something else as well. Fruit is proof! Fruit is proof that we are disciples of Jesus. The goal of bearing fruit is for God to be glorified. God sent Jesus to be cut off so that we might be attached, so we might bear fruit, so the Father would be glorified.

The writers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism got it right! The first question is, “What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

Lives that abide in, remain in, continue in Jesus, bring glory to God.

The gospel, which is good news, is that Jesus, God's one and only Son, was sent to dwell among us as a man, to live the life that we should have lived, and bear the wrath of God on a cross. He was cut off, so that that anyone, absolutely anyone, anyone in this room right now or listening to this sermon, anyone who believes in Jesus could be attached to the true vine, could abide in Him and bear much fruit.

I'll close with this quote from Charles Spurgeon, “Do you merely find temporary shelter in Jesus, as a ship runs into harbor in stormy weather and then comes out again when the gale is over? But cast anchor in Him...Abide in Jesus!”