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# Encounter(ing) God

Jesus

Part 9

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## Today

- **The True Vine**

## The I AM Statements of Jesus

...what Jesus said about Himself

- **I AM** — Self-Existent, Self-Sufficient, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Ever-Present, God in human flesh who has come to invite you into glorious relationship/friendship.
- **I am** the Bread of Life — satisfies spiritual hunger and thirst and gives eternal life
- **I am** the Light of the World — keeps us from walking in spiritual darkness
- **I am** the Door — gives access to God
- **I am** the Good Shepherd — lays life down for sheep, so they can have life
- **I am** the Resurrection and the Life — gives eternal life to Believers
- **I am** the Way, the Truth, the Life
- **I am the Vine**

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## I AM the True Vine

### John 15: 1-11

“**I am the true vine**, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear **much fruit** and so prove to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

**SPIRITUAL PROOF**

**SPIRITUAL PRUNING**

**SPIRITUAL POWER**

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## Spiritual Proof

- Jesus takes the Old Testament imagery of the vine and flips it on its head
  - Throughout the Old Testament, the imagery of the vine is used as a reference of Judgment on God's people.
  - It's always used as a **negative reference** because Israel was not what God intended them to be: ***a nation that would stand as an example to the rest of the world of what it meant to be a nation ruled by God.***
  - To show the world a different and new way of life that would draw all people to Himself..
  - *...and the vine reference was to say, "Israel, you were supposed to bear fruit... you were supposed to be a fruit-filled vineyard, you were supposed to be attractive and beneficial, and point people back to me... a blessing to the world. But you bear no fruit—and God's wrath, His judgment is coming.*
- Jesus flips the imagery upside down.
  - He says, "What Israel has failed to be, I AM. "I am the TRUE VINE!"
  - *"All that your ancestors failed to do, thousands of years of toil, of trials, suffering, of struggle, of wrestling... and failure... it's all resolved in one person. And you're looking at Him."*

**Question — How do you know? How do you know that you've encountered God? What is the evidence that your faith is real?**

- **John 15:8**

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

### **Spiritual fruit is the evidence of a genuine faith.**

- **James 2:18-19**

*"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup>You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! <sup>20</sup>But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"*

*In other words, faith without fruitfulness proves that your faith wasn't genuine from the start. James says, "even the demons believe..." but the demons don't bear fruit.*

**Question — If you step back and look at your life, you look back at your relationships, do you see fruit, consistent beneficial impact in the lives around you, do you see evidence of people's lives being made better because of your presence in them? Are people closer to Christ because of your life? Are you a person that builds people up or tears them down? Do you use people to serve yourself, or give of yourself to serve people?**

*If you that hear those questions and think, "No, my faith is real, but I'm really gonna prove it! I'm going to be way more selfless... I'm going to be way more disciplined, I'm going to be way more generous, or caring, thoughtful... I'm gonna try really hard."*

- and you can feel yourself get anxious, and frantic — and the weight of all the expectations that are weighing on you are heavy enough...

**Question — Why does Jesus use this imagery? The vine, the branches, the Father is the vinedresser... why?**

- Here's why: **Because it's simple.**
- There are many moments in Scripture where Jesus says something that's really complicated. This is not one of those moments.
- **John 15:4**  
 “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.”
- **ILLUSTRATION:** A sheep produces wool... you've never seen a sheep frantically running around trying to figure out how it's going to produce wool. You don't see sheep trying to produce wool, “*I'm going produce so much wool! I'm going to produce way more wool than Billy over there...*” No, a sheep's job is to follow the shepherd, it eats and sleeps where the shepherd tells it, and over time the sheep naturally produces wool. It doesn't have to try. It just happens. Why? Because it's a sheep! That's what a sheep does.
- Jesus says here, “You are a branch, your job is not to produce fruit. Your job is to stay connected to the vine and the byproduct of your connection to that vine will be that you produce fruit! A branch doesn't muster up a bunch of energy, and stress and try really hard to force some fruit to pop out! The job of the branch is to focus on the vine before you know it, some fruit appears....”
- **Galatians 5:22-23**  
 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control.”
  - Notice that the fruit of the spirit... not one of them is a reference to your behavior... *what you do.*
  - But all of them reference *who you are, your character...*
  - It's not “do you do loving things?” — it's “are you a loving person?”
  - It's not “do you do good things?” — it's “is the overarching pattern of your life one of moral integrity and goodness, selflessness, and gentleness, joy, peace, patience...?”
  - And if you belong to Jesus, God's desire is to grow all of these traits in you, to mature you — so that they would be manifested through you...

Wherever you are in your journey with Christ, His desire is to grow all of these traits in you, not at the same rate necessarily, like a cluster of grapes on a vine... they all grow together but at a different rate...and as the life of the Vine flows through you, all of these traits will be growing in you, gradually over time... and the Vinedresser wants you to grow to be mature and fruitful...

That all sounds wonderful and grand... but there is a problem:

**Many of us want to be spiritually fruitful  
without having to become spiritually mature.**

One doesn't come without the other. Just take the metaphor another layer deeper...

- The branches that produce the best fruit are the most mature branches.
- It's the old, strong branches that can bear way more fruit and much healthier fruit than a little sapling.

**Question — How do I become spiritually mature? How do I grow stronger, healthier; how do these traits grow in me and through me?"**

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## Spiritual Pruning

- **John 15:2**

“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he **prunes...**”

- A skilled gardener knows what branches to keep, and what branches to cut off. That gardener will take away everything that will suck the fruitfulness out of the branch...
- He'll take away what will weaken the branch and leave what will strengthen it.

- **John 15:2**

“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.**”

- If the branch is going to reach its full potential, if it's to grow to maturity, if the branch is going to get stronger and bear, not just a little fruit, but a whole lot of fruit... it must be pruned.

**IMPORTANT** — When something is taken out of your life... Habits. Relationships. Career. Money. Reputation... chances are you're being pruned.

**Question — Are you telling me that God looks at us and says, “Hmm what will it take to help him or her reach their full potential? Ooo I know, I'll send some terrible things into their life. That should do it!”**

- “My sibling died at a young age, or my child, or a parent... Do you mean to tell me that God sent that into my life to make me a better person? What kind of God do you people serve?”

**And the objection is totally valid — IF that's what Jesus is saying... but it's not.**

The imagery here is saying that **pruning comes to every single branch.**

**But if you're hooked into the true vine,** suffering, loss, hardship, tragedy...

- it won't make you **bitter, it will make you better.**
- It won't **weaken you, it will strengthen you,**
- because if a branch is connected to the Vine and it gets pruned, it causes the branch to **draw more deeply on the vine for life,** for nourishment, for strength...

**But if you're not connected** into the True Vine, the suffering you experience in life is arbitrary! You have nothing to draw your life from... suffering and loss make you cold, calloused, and bitter, hard-hearted... There's no fruit, there's no life... and it eventually causes you to wither... And Jesus says, you're only good to be gathered up and thrown into the fire.

- Is that a reference to hell? Absolutely it is.
- This is the other problem some have with Christianity, they don't like the idea of hell.
- ...Neither do I! — So get connected to the Vine!

**Jesus is saying,** *“I am the source of life... and if you'll connect yourself to me, my life will flow through you... but if you refuse to abide in me you're just dead wood. You can't produce anything of lasting, eternal value... and you'll be thrown into the fire.”*

- The beauty of the gospel is that Jesus himself was cut off — so that you and I could be grafted in!
- Jesus was cut off — so that we would only ever be pruned.
- That's His desire for you... but you have a decision to make.

**Question — Are you going to connect to the Vine and have life, or are you going to be a branch out there on your own, trying to act like you have life but really — you're dead?**

- *for those of us that are connected to the Vine...*
- we want to be fruitful, but we don't want to be pruned!
- And Jesus tells us, if you want to be fruitful... you must be pruned
  - a branch doesn't know what's best for itself
  - we don't really know what's best for ourselves either
  - the Vinedresser, the Father knows what we don't. He sees what we can't
  - He's absolutely committed to our growth, to our maturity
  - **WHY? So that we would bear MUCH FRUIT and bring glory to Him!**

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## Spiritual Power

*Pastor Rob tells a personal and moving story of how he learned to become a branch truly connected to the Vine. Please watch the video to experience this part of the sermon.*

- A branch has ONE JOB! Stay connected to the Vine! Receive its life from the Vine, grow in its dependence on the Vine! And guess what? Fruit happens!
- **John 15:5**  
*“...apart from me you can do nothing.”*
  - Apart from me you won't produce anything of eternal value or impact.
- **Psalm 127:1-2**  
*“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain... It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil.”*

*I wonder how many of us are eating the bread of anxious toil... we're a branch disconnected from the Vine, working ourselves into the ground trying to produce lasting fruit... or trying really hard to mature...*

**God is the One who is working and moving,  
 building and orchestrating, shaping and pruning —  
 making things happen that are totally out of our control.  
 What's our job?  
 Connect to the vine and chill out! Rest!**

- **You have one job, follower of Jesus —**
  - abide in Him, lean on Him, trust in Him, connect with Him
  - whatever the outcome, whatever the fruit, whatever the results... don't worry about it!
  - the results are in His hands...
- **God invites us to be a people at peace, at rest.**
  - see that's our power. We know that we're connected to the Vine
  - we know the Vinedresser is doing His perfect work in us...
  - we can have a peace that even though pruning is going to come into our lives
  - God is always at work for our good.

**Our power, our strength comes when we're drawing our life from the vine.**

*But what many of us do, what I've done in the past... many of us we don't really want to connect to the vine. **We really just want someone else to connect to the vine for us and instead of our being connected to the Vine, we'll just connect to them...***

*There's a book called Movements That Move that researches and describes movements of God that have happened throughout the history of the church and all around the world... and in it the author talks about the single thing that all movements had in common — was that they began with a founder who knew God deeply... but the single thing that killed movements is when the followers stopped knowing God and only knew the founder. In other words, movements die when people stop connecting with the vine and only connect to another branch. We'd rather let another branch do the work of connecting with Jesus and suck the life out of that branch, than connect to the Vine ourselves.<sup>1</sup>*

*"It's convenient... it's easy... I'll just let Pastor Steve, or Jonathan, or Rob, or Ian or Bill, or whoever connect to Jesus for me and I'll enjoy their fruit..."*

We can't give you life. I love Steve. He's changed the trajectory of my life! But Steve's just a branch! I'm just a branch! Bill Spencer is a branch! Dr. Rutland is a branch. I love these guys! They're amazing! But as amazing as they are, they're not a vine! **But there's only one vine and His name is Jesus!**

**If you want to be filled with LIFE and POWER  
and produce abiding fruit...  
you have ONE JOB, follower of Christ —  
connect to the VINE, abide in Jesus, be with Jesus!**

**IMAGINE:** *Do you have any idea what would happen if every single one of us were all were connected to the Vine, abiding in Jesus, us in Him, Him in us, being pruned, growing to maturity... each of us producing*

<sup>1</sup> Dwight Marable, *Movements that Move* (Missions International, Aug 1, 2015)

fruit in our own, unique, God breathed, eternally significant ways... Can you imagine if every single one of us graciously submitted to whatever pruning is coming our way? ... can you imagine what would happen? **A new movement of God would begin!**

Can you imagine? What might He change in you? What might begin to change in your marriage? In your family? In your home? In your neighborhood? What new dreams might God birth in you, and inspire through you? What doors might God open for you? Can you imagine what Sunday morning would be like?

- It wouldn't be, "I'm coming to get fed." It would be, "I'm coming to celebrate!!!! All that He's done, is doing in my life!! I'm just a simple branch but by the grace of God, I'm bearing fruit and the Father is being glorified through ME!"

"When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense that some of his bad habits are now corrected) he often feels that it would now be natural if things went fairly smoothly. When troubles come along—illnesses, money troubles, new kinds of temptation—he is disappointed. These things, he feels, might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why now? Because God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level: putting him into situations where he will have to be very much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing

He means to make of us."<sup>2</sup>

~ C.S. Lewis

- **John 15:5**

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears **much fruit.**"

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## Discussion Questions

1. How does the Old Testament imagery of "the vine" differ from Jesus' usage of "the vine"?
2. Read James 2:18-19 and discuss "faith without works is dead."
3. In your life as a branch, have you ever tried to produce fruit by yourself, while not fully abiding in the vine? What were the results?
4. How do you explain "spiritual pruning"?
5. Is there a time when you have been aware of being "spiritually pruned"? Did it make you bitter or better?
6. What is the ONE JOB a branch has? If the branch stays true to that job every day, what are the results?

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<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (Zondervan, Feb 6, 2007) 162

# NOTES