



“Sacrificially Giving”

Week 5 | November 4, 2018

John 15:1-17

Sermon Summary: In Jesus’ “farewell discourse”—delivered to his disciples in the Upper Room (before his arrest and crucifixion)—he proclaimed, “I am the True Vine.” This was the last of his seven great “I am” sayings, in which Jesus revealed his identity in divine terms. And in this one is particularly provocative. The vine was Israel’s national symbol. It was their identity and the image on their money. Jesus appropriates it and says “I am the true Israel, the true people of God; the one who will bear the real fruit of righteousness.” I am the vine, and my people are the branches. Everything else is slated for burning.

A comparable agrarian symbol might be the apple. We start the alphabet: “A is for apple.” We say good health begins with “an apple a day keeps the doctor away.” Our true love is “the apple of our eye.” The quintessential citizen or cultural icon is “as American as apple pie.” Imagine Jesus saying, “Well, actually, all of that is really about me. I am the true apple. I start your alphabet; I give your health; I am your heart’s desire; I am the ultimate cultural icon.”

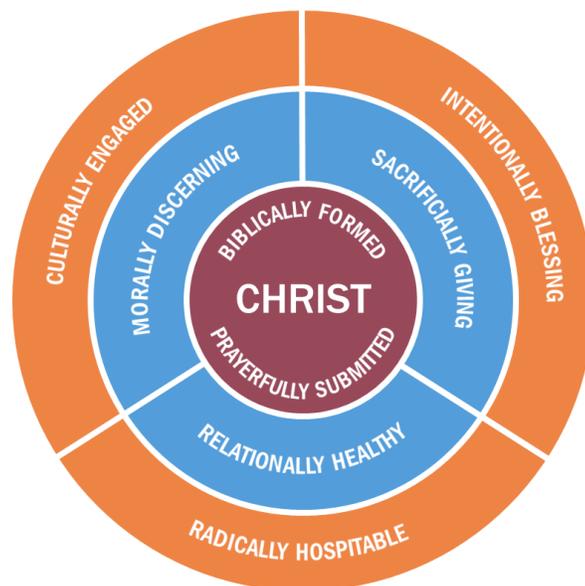
This was just the latest and largest example of Jesus’ “replacement theology.” He had already declared himself the new and true Moses, the new and true Passover, the new and true Temple. Now he is the nation itself—he and the people with him. Imagine Jesus showing up in Washington and saying, “These memorials will be destroyed without one stone left on another. From now on, I am the founding father, the freedom-giver, the fruit-bearer. *I got your amber waves of grain right here.*” It would sound delusional.

But what makes it hopeful is that Israel had never been able to produce good fruit. Every example of vine imagery in the Old Testament is negative. For example, Isaiah 5:7: “The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”

Israel could never be what it was supposed to be. But now in Christ it’s possible. In fact, it’s *inevitable*. If we remain in the vine, Jesus promises “you will bear much fruit.”

This is gospel! We don’t have to try harder or even work smarter; we just have to abide “vital-er.” Let the word of God flow in us, return it to God in prayer, and just watch the fruit happen!

And the result of that will be glory to God and joy to us. God will be magnified as the giver of life and the source of our goodness and righteousness in the world. That glory will redound to us in the joy of the Lord—Christ’s joy in us—that is, the satisfaction we get from being united with him and being *in him* exactly what we were meant to be: abundant fruit-bearing branches.



This is the indicative of the gospel, the **what is**. And *what is* is **Christ, the True Vine**.

The imperative of the gospel is **what should be**. And *what should be* is **True Love**. Not mere sentiment; not cheap verbal declarations, but true, sacrificially giving, others' oriented action. As 1 John 3:18 says, "Let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and truth."

The standard for this love is John 15:12: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Here we're not just doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, or loving our neighbor as ourselves. Those commands, while good and true, make us the measure of love. In the farewell discourse, Jesus makes himself the measure of our love. We are to love others like he loves us.

Discussion Guide

1. Read John 15:1-17.
2. When Jesus declared himself to be the True Vine, he was making a revolutionary statement. He was the new and true nation, and only people who were connected to him would bear the fruit of righteousness and love. People who were invested in the old system and benefitting from it, hated his "replacement theology." But people who were not well served clung to Christ.
 - Do you see any parallels to our national circumstances today?
 - How do you come to grips with Jesus as a revolutionary replacement for our national, economic, and religious allegiances? Most of us are pretty well served by this world, making it hard for us to give our allegiance to Jesus. (We may recall these words: "How hard it is for the rich to enter heaven. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.....") How does Jesus' identity as the True Vine challenge you?
3. How would you explain the "mechanics" of fruit-bearing to a person who was unfamiliar with this passage? What does it mean to bear fruit? How does it happen?
4. How is God glorified through our fruitfulness?
5. How does fruitfulness result in our joy?
6. Jesus says he wants our joy to be complete, but then he goes on to call us to lay down our lives. Aren't those two different things? How do joy and self-sacrifice fit together?
7. Jesus says that we are to love one another as he has loved us.
 - List at least 10 ways that Jesus has loved you.
 - Pick one of these that feels convicting or challenging as a way to love others. Name it. What will you do this week to activate this way of loving?