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The Vine and the Vinedresser

John 15.1-3

Series: Signs of Life

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I. Introduction

- A. I was traveling last week with a dear friend
 - 1. He asked me if we were going back in the Gospel of John this week on Sunday
 - a. I told him we were
 - 2. He then wondered when we would finish the Gospel of John
 - a. Some questions simply can't be answered
 - b. That may be one of the secret things that belong to the Lord our God (**Deuteronomy 29.29**)
 - 3. This is the 117th message in the Signs of Life series
 - a. Started by in 2016
 - b. We've had three presidents since I started this series
 - 4. But there is so much rich instruction found in this gospel I haven't felt pressed to finish it within any particular time frame
 - a. And we do break up the series from time to time
 - b. Communion Sundays I've used a different series as well
 - 5. So I really don't know when we'll finish John
 - a. God knows
- B. But then my friend told me about a Bible study on the Gospel of John he attended one time when he was in the military
 - 1. He said the leader spent an inordinate amount of time on the question "why was the Gospel of John written?"
 - a. He had tried to piece together some reasons why the gospel was written by looking at a whole host of verses, then reasoning why Jesus would have said those things, all trying to come to a conclusion why the gospel of John was written
 - 2. My friend then said, why didn't he just read John 20.30-31
 - a. **John 20:30-31** (NASB95) — 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.
 - 3. Sometimes the scholars can't see the forest for the trees
- C. One of the other major questions which is usually associated with the Gospel of John is "who is Jesus?"
 - 1. **Who is Jesus?** – what is His identity?

- a. What are we to make of this amazing Galilean rabbi?
 - b. Who is that masked man?
 - 2. Once again, the answer may be simpler than many scholars would imagine
 - a. It's right in the text that we just read
 - b. "... that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..."
- D. We're at a point in our study of John where it may be useful to remind ourselves of what we have learned about Jesus over these years of study
 - 1. Two ways in which the gospel has answered those questions
 - 2. **Follow the signs**
 - a. "... these [signs] have been written so that you may believe the Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..."
 - b. Seven such signs recorded in this gospel
 - c. **Changing the water into wine at Cana (John 1.1-11)**
 - d. **Healing the royal official's son (John 4.46-54)**
 - e. **Healing the paralyzed man at pool of Bethesda (John 5.1-15)**
 - f. **Feeding the 5,000 (John 6.5-14)**
 - g. **Walking on water (John 6.16-21)**
 - h. **Healing the man born blind (John 9.1-7)**
 - i. **Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11.1-45)**
 - 3. In each of those episodes we learn something about Jesus that inevitably lead us to the conclusion that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God

II. **The Gospel of John Through the Eyes of Jesus**

- A. But the other way to learn something about who Jesus is is to simply ask Him
 - 1. In addition to following the signs, in order to understand who Jesus is is to follow who He Himself says He is
 - 2. Just as there are seven signs recorded in the Gospel of John, there are seven statements Jesus makes about Himself that He introduces by saying **"I am..."**
 - a. They are the "I am" sayings of the Gospel of John
- B. **I am the bread of Life (John 6.35, 41, 48, 51)**
 - 1. He had just fed the 5,000, contrasts His act with what Moses had done in providing manna in the wilderness
 - a. But He is the living bread "...that comes down from heaven which anyone may eat and not die." (John 6.49-50)
- C. **I am the light of the world (John 8.12, 9.5)**
 - 1. He was just about to heal the man born blind
 - a. He demonstrated that He was God incarnate, echoing Genesis 1.3 when God said, "Let there be light"
- D. **I am the door (John 10.7, 9)**
 - 1. Using the metaphor of the sheepfold He establishes that He, Jesus, is the only way to enter the fold, and that "... he who does not enter ... by the door but climbs in by another way,... is a thief and a robber." (John 10.1)
- E. **I am the good shepherd (John 10.11, 14)**
 - 1. Demonstrates that He cares for His own, even by laying down His life for

- God, i.e., in the name of Jesus
- f. No wonder that Chapter 14 is such a beloved chapter
 2. And then Chapter 14 ends on what appears to be a note of finality
 - a. “Get up, let us go from here.”
 3. So you get the impression that the disciples get up from the table in the Upper Room, and leave
 - a. But then they don’t appear to leave
 - b. Jesus continues to teach
 - c. Chapter 15 – the Vine and the Vinedresser
 - d. The disciples’ relation to one another
 - e. The disciples’ relation to the world
 - f. Chapter 16 – More about the promised HS
 - g. More about the promise of answered prayer
 - h. Chapter 17 – Jesus’ prayer to the father
 - i. Then in Chapter 18 they finally cross the Kidron valley and enter the Garden of Gethsemane
 4. It could be that when Jesus says, “Get up, let us go from here” – that just starts the process of leaving – which you all know takes time
 - a. Or it may be that they actually do get up and go
 - b. And that Jesus teaches them these things as they walk out of Jerusalem toward the gate that takes them to the Kidron Valley
 - c. He did, after all, do a great deal of teaching as he walked
 - d. He was, as they say, a peripatetic teacher
- B. But whatever the setting, when he starts teaching he focuses on vines and branches, vineyards and vinedressers
1. In southwest Florida, we seem to grow everything except grapes!
 - a. But not so in Israel
 - b. There are vines everywhere
 - c. Vineyards, their management, their value – are pervasive and everywhere to behold
 - d. So it makes perfect sense that Jesus would use vines and vineyards as object lessons in His teaching
- C. But even more likely, Jesus teaches about vines, vineyards and vinedressers because those things have been used in the OT to describe the nature of the relationship between Israel and God
1. The vine, or the vineyard, is the pervasive symbol of Israel
 - a. **Israel is God’s choice vine or God’s vineyard**
 2. **Ezekiel 19:10** (NASB95) — 10 ‘Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard, Planted by the waters; It was fruitful and full of branches Because of abundant waters.’
 3. **Psalms 80:8–10** (NASB95) — 8 You removed a vine from Egypt; You drove out the nations and planted it. 9 You cleared the ground before it, And it took deep root and filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered with its shadow, And the cedars of God with its boughs.
 4. But the OT describes the relationship between God and His choice vine as

troubled at best

5. **Isaiah 5:1-2** (NASB95) — 1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. 2 He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.
 6. **Isaiah 5:7** (NASB95) — 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.
 7. **Jeremiah 2:21** (NASB95) — 21 “Yet I planted you a choice vine, A completely faithful seed. How then have you turned yourself before Me Into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?”
- D. Even today, a bunch of grapes on the vine is used as a symbol of Israel
1. But the OT portrays the vineyard image as indicative of Israel’s degeneration, its spiritual poverty, its tendency toward idolatry
- E. And so when Jesus shows up and declares “I am the true vine” He is declaring a radical reorientation for the people of God
1. In the OT Israel, the people of God are given a special vocation
 - a. They are to be God’s holy people
 - b. They are to be the representatives of God to the entire world
 - c. They, as Abraham’s descendants, are to be a blessing to all nations
 2. But sadly, Israel has instead become like all the other nations
 - a. They have replaced the worship of Yahweh with the worship of the idols of the surrounding nations
 - b. Instead of being the Servant of the Lord they have become the servant of Baal
 3. But Jesus – as Isaiah’s Servant Hymns that we have been examining on communion Sundays have described – has come to the rescue
 - a. While Israel could not fulfill its calling as the servant of the Lord, Jesus fulfills that calling as *The* Servant of the Lord
 4. So instead of Israel being the vine
 - a. Jesus is the true vine
- F. So as we examine this remarkable metaphor for the next couple of weeks, see in Jesus the fulfillment of the promise of a people who will ultimately gather a holy people – Jew and Gentile
1. And who will bless all nations in the process

IV. **The Vinedresser**

- A. **John 15:1-2** (NASB95) — 1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.
 1. “My Father is the vinedresser
- B. **His care**

1. **John 15:2** (NASB95) — 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.
2. In this verse we see a wonderful picture of the care of the Father for His children; of the vinedresser for His vine
 - a. But unfortunately it is masked in most translations
3. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, **He takes away**”
 - a. “Takes away” is a translator’s interpretation – and a rather unfortunate one at that
 - b. They do it, I believe, to make it consistent with what Jesus says in v. 6: **John 15:6** (NASB95) — 6 “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”
4. But the Greek words are different
 - a. “Takes away” (v. 2) is not the same word as “thrown away” in v. 6
5. In v 2, **“takes away”** is the *Greek* word **airo**
 - a. While it could mean “takes away” in the sense of “dispose of” it more often used to mean “lift up” or to “lift from the ground”
6. And that’s what a vinedresser does with a branch of grapes when their branch is trailing on the ground
 - a. Grapes are not like pumpkins or squash which grow well on the ground
 - b. When grapes lie on the ground the vinedresser will lift them up
 - c. String them up on a trellis, give them a chance to grow without blemish
 - d. And this portion of the parable has to do with the care of the vine – not with the destruction of corrupt branches
7. What a beautiful image of a gracious and compassionate heavenly Father who does whatever He can to preserve and provide for His children!
8. **Luke 13:6–9** (NASB95) — 6 And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 “And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ 8 “And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’ ”
 - a. Second chance for the fig tree
 - b. Second chance for the vinedresser to care for the vine
9. Have you been given a second chance by the Vinedresser?
 - a. Third chance?
 - b. Fourth chance?
 - c. How many times has the Vinedresser lifted you up off the ground?
 - d. How many times has the Vinedresser worked on your behalf to preserve your life and make you grow?

- e. For me – more than I can count or even remember
10. If I'm not bearing fruit, the first thing He does is to lift me up where I can be nourished by the Sun of righteousness

C. **His pruning**

1. **John 15:1-2** (NASB95) — 1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”
2. So the vinedresser prunes the branches that are bearing fruit
3. This **Greek** word is **kathairo = cleanse or purify**
 - a. Cf catharsis
 - b. The vinedresser removes, cleans, those elements which hinder the development of fruit
 - c. Perhaps these are bad habits
 - d. Changed values
 - e. Priorities reordered
 - f. Whatever hinders our spiritual growth is taken away
4. Taken away because of the loving care of the Vinedresser
5. When we come to Christ, grow closer to Christ we find ourselves changing
 - a. We lose interest in some of the things that fed our sinful natures or our selfish desires
 - b. Those things get stripped away
6. What things has the Vinedresser stripped away from you?
 - a. What desires and inclinations have hindered your walk with Christ?
 - b. What attitudes or behaviors have been altered as you have grown with Christ?
7. **1 Corinthians 13:11** (NASB95) — 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.
 - a. What childish things have you put behind you because the Vinedresser has cleansed you, has purified you, has purged you, has pruned you
 - b. What speech have you discarded?
 - c. What thinking is now in your rear view mirror?
 - d. What reasoning have you cast aside?
 - e. What manners of life have been pruned from you?

D. **His fruit**

1. **John 15:2** (NASB95) — 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”
2. All so we may bear more fruit
 - a. The fruit is **Christian character**
 - b. The fruit is the fruit of the Spirit
 - c. **Galatians 5:22-23** (NASB95) — 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23

- gentleness, self-control...
3. And it is that kind of character that will be most notable to the world
 - a. To a world in distress and dysfunction
 - b. To a world in corruption and selfishness
 - c. To a world in chaos and division
 4. Only when believers in Jesus find themselves cared for by the Vinedresser
 - a. Lifted up so we can grow
 - b. Pruned so there is little to hinder our testimony or our lives
 5. Only then will the world take notice
 - a. Only then will our message be taken seriously
 6. Jesus is the vine – but you are the branches
 - a. And the branches bear the fruit
 - b. And only do so because the Father, the Vinedresser, cares for, nurtures, and prunes the branches

V. **The Vine**

- A. This text says just a bit more about the vine and the branches
 1. **John 15:3** (NASB95) — 3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”
- B. **The condition**
 1. This a wonderfully encouraging word about the spiritual condition of those who are growing in Christ
 - a. Not those who are perfect
 - b. Perfect doesn’t happen in this life, but in the life to come!
 2. But Jesus says, “You are already clean...”
 - a. **Clean = kathairo** – same word as pruned
 3. Jesus is saying to these Upper Room disciples, the 12 (11 really without Judas) that they have already been pruned; they are already clean!
- C. **The cause**
 1. But why are they clean?
 - a. What has happened to prune these believers?
 2. **John 15:3** (NASB95) — 3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”
 - a. It is the word of Jesus that has pruned them
 - b. It is the word of God that does the cleansing
 3. What kind of branch do you want to be?
 - a. A branch that bears fruit?
 - b. A branch that in Christ fulfills the vocation of the people of God
 - c. A branch that participates in blessing all nations?
 - d. A branch that exemplifies the kind of Christian character that gains the attention of a dysfunctional world?
 4. That kind of branch can only happen through the word of Christ
 - a. The cause of our pruning, our cleansing is the Word of God, the word of Christ
 5. That’s why we study the Bible together

- a. That's why we spend time in the word on our own
 - b. That's why do things like Study with the Pastor where we're all studying the same passages of scripture each day, then gathering to share what God has been teaching us
6. You are already pruned, cleaned – because of the Word of Christ acting to prune whatever habits, attitudes, and behaviors are diverting and distracting us from fulfilling our mission

VI. Conclusion

- A. **John 15:1-3** (NASB95) — 1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”