

Text: John 15:1-8

Title: It's Personal – I am the Vine

Thesis: Because Jesus is the source of power and motivation in the believer's life, Christians should be bearing spiritual fruit as a demonstration of our connectedness to Him.

I. Introduction

- a. NTA: "I am" statements: They range from the proclamation of God as to His identity when speaking to Moses from the burning bush, to the more recent emphatic statement of "I am," when answering the question of responsibility for the leading of a family in the movie *Courageous*. In between those two, and uniting those two, are the "I am" statements of Jesus, who can say "I am" the self-existing God, and equally can say "I am" the man you should pattern yourself after.

II. Identity (1-2)

- a. E – Jesus begins an extended metaphor that describes the relationship between Christ and the people of God. In this, the last of the "I am" statements in the book of John, Jesus also includes the Father, perhaps pointing back to the emphasis of the unity of Father and Son from chapter 14. In these first two verses, Jesus says nothing about the disciples, the focus is on the Father and Son. Branches are mentioned, but their identity is not explicit.
 - i. OT theme of vine – frequently the OT uses the theme of the vine, with some differences. God is still the gardener, but the vine is about to be destroyed as a result of its unfruitfulness – see Ps. 80, Ez. 15, 17, Hos. 10. (Most understand this to be a picture of Israel.) In this case, the vine is the Son, and the vine itself is in no danger of judgment. The branches however, may be. The metaphorical identity shifts, with the Son as the vine and an intermediary between the Father and the people of God.
 - ii. Note also that the fruitful branches are pruned to be more productive – something to remember when we discuss the identity of the branches.
 - iii. Note also, the difference in the branches is not wrapped up around identity, but fruitfulness.
 1. What Kind of Fruit? Some say evangelistic successes, some say acts of compassion and love. Both are considered fruit through the teaching of Christ; so don't make this false distinction. They are both expected.

III. Instruction (3-4)

- a. E – You who are cleansed – Jesus turns to address those who are the fruitful branches, those who have responded in faith to the salvation which Jesus offers (the word which I have spoken). The command (imperative) is to abide in Christ. In ch. 14, John talks about Christ abiding in the Father, and the Spirit abiding in the disciples, and now the disciples are commanded to abide in Christ. Being independent from the vine of necessity results in fruitlessness. You cannot bear fruit apart from Christ. Remaining in Christ is the prerequisite to Christian discipleship. While it is a command to remain connected to Christ, it is at the same time a very liberating idea – fruit-bearing is produced from connection to Christ, not through independent effort.

- b. I – We cannot be our own source of power in this world, and we cannot be our own measuring stick for what is fruitful. It has led us as a society, and will lead us as individuals to lower and lower expectations of morality and spiritual fruit.
 - i. Another poll sheds light on this paradox of increased religiosity and decreased morality. According to sociologist Robert Bellah, 81 percent of the American people also say they agree that "an individual should arrive at his or her own religious belief independent of any church or synagogue." Thus the key to the paradox is the fact that those who claim to be Christians are arriving at faith on their own terms -- terms that make no demands on behavior. A woman named Sheila, interviewed for Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*, embodies this attitude. "I believe in God," she said. "I can't remember the last time I went to church. But my faith has carried me a long way. It's 'Sheila-ism.' Just my own little voice." – Charles Colson, *Against the Night*
 - c. A – Even though it's a command, the result of abiding is more of a passive activity. We stop doing. We rely on Christ in us. We provide the conduit for Christ's work in the world around us, and this happens in the deepening relationship with Christ.
- IV. Identity 2.0 (5-6)
- a. E – A second statement about Jesus as the vine: The reminder here is for complete clarity – We are not the vine. (Remember the issue in Genesis 3 – “to be like God?”) The explicit statement that the disciples are the branches comes with a reminder that through abiding in Christ they will bear much fruit. But it also comes with a warning, that apart from Christ we can do nothing (and that is not something). Those who do nothing are in danger of judgment – a vine branch which had been removed was not even useful to make something else out of, as was possible with a tree.
 - b. I – I remember, when I was a child, going into my great-grandmother's house and always seeing a bowl of fruit on the kitchen table. There was always bright colored apples, bananas, pears. Every time I came in, there was fruit on the table. And I can remember being puzzled about there always being fruit. One day, as a young child I realized that nobody ever ate out of that bowl of fruit. So I investigated further, only to discover that it was indeed made of wax. Beautiful to look at, but not in any way fit to eat. Appearance only.
 - c. A – We are expected to bear fruit, but we cannot bear fruit without the vine. Anything we do without Christ is equivalent to wax fruit in a bowl, pleasing to the eye, but worthless for sustenance.
- V. Conclusions
- a. N – Apart from Christ you can do nothing which is of eternal value. Come to Him today.
 - b. B –
 - i. Are you a fruitful branch that is being pruned, enduring something painful? Remember that God may be removing something which will hinder your productivity. He's making you into a more fruitful branch.
 - ii. Are you finding yourself less productive? Are you in a season in which you need to refocus on abiding in Christ?