

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 18th April 2010

'I am the True Vine'

John 15:1-27

Introduction

We come tonight to the last of the Seven "I am" Sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel. It's in John 15:1 "**Jesus said, "I am the True Vine."**

If you look closely you will find that John ch.15 is all about relationships. The relationship between Christ and his followers is pictured in the relationship between the Vine and the branches, and also with the gardener who prunes the Vine, so that it will bear more fruit.

This chapter is all about abiding in Christ, i.e drawing our spiritual life and sustenance from him. Here Jesus is making the point that his people in the New Testament aren't so much supposed to follow a religion, but to follow Him and have a personal relationship with Him, and this relationship should be marked by love and joy, and fruitfulness.

It's possible that Jesus has left the Upper Room now, where He and his disciples have been since Ch.13:1. We get this from ch.14:31. Perhaps now they are walking through the Garden (probably Gethsemane) and there Jesus notices a vine, and uses it as an illustration or visual aid to teach his disciples an important lesson.

Now there are three things that you need to know about vines in order to understand what Jesus is getting at in this passage:-

1. The vine was often used as a picture of Israel in the Old Testament.
(See Isaiah 5:1-7).

Israel was the Vineyard that God the gardener had planted and tended and cared for.

The problem was that Israel had failed to maintain her relationship with God, and she therefore became unfruitful and barren. Whenever God came looking for his harvest from her she had failed to produce the fruit that God had expected. So God tore down her boundaries, and scattered her into exile, to prune her, till only a small remnant remained, and out of that pruned nation (the Israel of Jesus' day) God was calling out a people for himself to have a personal relationship with Him, and to bear the fruit that he had always looked for.

The Disciples were to be that pruned vine, and through them God would produce the fruit of a great harvest of souls who would come to know the Lord through their teaching, down through the years that have followed since.

So in John 15:1 Jesus declares, ***“I am the True Vine.”***

In other words he was saying that Old Testament Israel had failed - she had been a faulty vine - not genuine, but now Christ had come as the True, Genuine Vine. And only by being united to Him can we know true spiritual life, and then in turn produce true spiritual fruit.

Israel had just rejected him. They were dead. They were cut off from the life of the Vine, but his disciples had received him, so they were alive, they were in touch with the true vine, so they could bear fruit in the coming years (vs.1-4).

2. The Vine is the source of life for the branches (See vs.4-5)

As a Vine grows naturally it can obviously produce its own branches through normal growth, but a vine is special, because new branches from other plants can also be grafted into it.

(Paul deals with that idea in Romans 11:13a, 17-24.)

The point is that either way it is only by being united to the Vine that the branches can remain alive and bear fruit.

i.e Bearing fruit is the only sign of spiritual life. (v.8).

These disciples were not going to be able to produce spiritual fruit and a harvest of souls by going off and doing their own thing. Jesus was about to leave them, but he was going to put his Holy Spirit into their hearts, and it was only by remaining true to their Lord and in touch with His Spirit that they would be able to accomplish anything. Merely following a religion, or simply by keeping to a church's rules and regulations, or form of service or order of worship would not guarantee any success. It was only by drawing their life from Christ himself that they would be able to accomplish anything.

“Apart from me you can do nothing.” (v.5).

3. Vine branches are no use for anything else, but bearing fruit (v.6)

* They are too knarled/twisted to carve anything out of, or make anything from.

* They don't even burn well, so you can't even use them for fuel for the fire.

* In other words a branch is useless if it doesn't bear fruit.

In a very real sense, we are useless as Christians, unless we are bearing fruit. But Jesus fully expects that if we *are* true Christians then *we will* be bearing fruit, and the more we are in contact with our Saviour, the closer our walk with him, then the more fruitful our lives will become, the more evidence there will be that we are saved. Notice:-

(v.2) No fruit (v.2b) Fruit (v.2c) More fruit (v.5,8) Much Fruit.

I believe these are the three main truths that Jesus is trying to convey to us in these verses:-

1. Only in Christ (Not just by being Religious) can we experience true spiritual life. By accepting him and knowing him personally as our Saviour.

2. Once we become Christians we must go on finding our source of life and spiritual strength in Him. The Christian life is a relationship, it begins by meeting Christ personally for ourselves, but it doesn't end there, we must continue to get to know him better, to spend time with him, to draw our strength and vitality from him. By abiding in Christ – i.e. by developing our relationship with him day by day.

3. Only as we draw our strength and ability from him in prayer will we be able to bear spiritual fruit at all, and in due course to become more fruitful. Spiritual fruit in our lives is the only evidence that we are truly saved and truly united to Christ. If there's no fruit then there's a big question mark as to whether we are saved at all.

Q. Is your life and mine exhibiting any spiritual fruit?
(John 15:8, See Matthew 7:20).

**But when we talk about our lives bearing fruit,
what sort of fruit do we mean?**

1. The first fruit we need to see is the Fruit of the Spirit.

Notice what Jesus goes on to talk about next in vs.9-17.
He talks about **Love** and he talks about **Joy**. Love and Joy are the first two Fruit of the Spirit according to Galatians 5:22-23.

But Love and Joy are very vague ideas until we see them in the context of what Jesus was talking about in vs.9-17.

Love is mentioned in very close connection to obeying Christ's commands.

We can't just say that we love God, and then go off and live as we like - that's not real. If we love God, then we will obey his commands.

And what are Christ's Commands? (See Matthew 22:37-40)

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." (Nos1-5)
"Love your neighbour as yourself." (Commands 6-10).

If we are truly Christians, truly united to Christ by Faith, truly saved, then we will be marked by a sincere, genuine love for the Lord. (cf. Exodus 20:1- 17). In other words, taking the Ten Commandments for a moment:

1. We will love the Lord as the Living and True God,
and put him first in our lives.
2. We will love to worship God in spirit and in truth,
not in any kind of false worship.
3. We will love the Lord's name, and it will annoy us when it is taken in vain.

4. We will love the Lord's Day,
and do our best to be with God's people for worship.
5. We will love those the Lord has given us in our families (esp. our parents).

But then in turn, our love for the Lord will also be seen in our love for our fellow-man:

6. We will not want to see another person's life taken,
or their character destroyed.
7. We will not want to see our marriage or anybody else's,
destroyed by unfaithfulness.
8. We will not want to see any harm done, or loss come,
to someone else's property.
9. We will not want to tell lies
or spread any half-truths about anybody else.
10. We will try to curb our desire to have more of this world's goods,
and learn to be content with what we have.

Do you see what I mean? We cannot talk about love and joy in a vacuum, for Jesus they were very practical things.

If we have a real genuine love for the Lord, then it will show in our lives in all of these practical ways, or it ought to do so more and more.

And it's as we learn to love the Lord more, and the things of this world less, that we will find the joy and contentment that Jesus was talking about here as well (v.11).

In vs.12-17 Jesus stresses especially that we need to love one another as believers. To be able to do this we will need the rest of the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives: (*Gal.5:23*)

"Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

So those are the first-fruits that we should be looking for in our own life, or in the life of anyone who claims to be a Christian - The Fruit of The Spirit.

But there is a second kind of fruit that we shouldn't lose sight of either:-

2. Bearing fruit by our witness for the Lord in the world in which we live.

If you look closely at vs.13-27 you will see this is what Jesus talks about next.

In v.13 he talks about the greatest demonstration of love ever - A man who laid down his life for his friends. This hadn't happened yet as Jesus was speaking, but within the next day or two it would happen.

Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt when the truth of those words finally dawned in their hearts? He was talking about them!

He talked about a man laying down his life for his friends –

“...and you are my friends, if you do what I command you.

I no longer call you servants... I call you friends.” (vs.13-15).

This was what he had commanded them to bear witness to - His death for them on the cross.

And what an incentive!

If they obeyed his command to go and tell the world about this, they would be regarded as his friends - not just his disciples, or his servants, but his friends!

He says in v.16 that this was why he had appointed them (i.e. as Apostles):

“I chose you... to go and bear fruit... fruit that will last.” (v.16)

What was he talking about here? - The fruit of the Spirit? - I don't think so. I think he was talking about the fruit of new converts to Christ that they would win to Christ through their witnessing, and their preaching of the cross of Christ – The Gospel.

Because in the next verses (18-25) he warns them again that this work of witnessing for Christ was going to be a difficult work, in a world that had no time for Christ.

But then he tells them again in vs.26-27 that they would not be on their own in this work. The Holy Spirit would be with them. He would testify about Christ. He would convince men to trust in Christ by convicting them of the sin in their hearts, and then pointing them to Christ as their only hope of salvation.

Have you ever experienced that convicting work of the Holy Spirit in your heart? Have you ever responded to the Gospel? Why not do it now?

But for us as Christians, it's a comfort to know that we cannot change any heart until the Holy Spirit convinces them. It's His work to do the saving.

But that doesn't mean that we sit back and do nothing.

Because in the very next verse, (v.27), Jesus says,

“And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

The Holy Spirit works with us, as we work with Him – So it's a partnership. (See Mark 16:19-20).

We can bear fruit as we go on witnessing for the Lord, because as we sow and plant the seed, and water it by prayer, it is the Holy Spirit who will give the increase by saving more and more people.

Conclusion

So through this series of “I am’s” in John’s Gospel we have learned all of this about Jesus:

He’s the Bread of Life – we need him for spiritual sustenance through life.

He’s the Light of the World - we need Him to show us the way out of the darkness.

He’s the Door - through which we must enter if we want to be saved.

He’s the Good Shepherd - who laid down his life for us, the sheep.

He is the Resurrection and the Life - whoever lives and believes in Him will never die.

He is the Way, the Truth and the Life - no one comes to the Father except through Him.

He is the Vine - so if we abide in Him and His Word abides in us, we will bear much fruit.

Does that describe the kind of relationship that you have with Jesus?

If not, why not?

That is the kind of relationship you can have with Jesus, if you come to him by faith tonight, trust him as your Saviour, and receive the Holy Spirit into your heart. From that moment onwards you will know God as your loving heavenly Father.