



from the desk of . . .

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**#801**

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**I AM - 7**

## **I AM THE VINE**

**John 15:1-8**

A certain missionary in Africa had set up a small, somewhat crude, Church building. And right next to it a little cottage in which he lived. Because there was no electricity in the village, he had a small generator to supply current for both the Church & his home.

One day some natives from an outlying mission came to visit him. He invited them into his house, & as they were talking they noticed the electric light hanging from a cord in the ceiling of his living room.

As evening came they watched wide-eyed as he flipped a switch & the light bulb began to shine!

Well, before they left, one of the visitors asked if he could have a bulb. The missionary, thinking he wanted it for a sort of trinket, gave him one.

On his next visit to that remote village, the missionary stopped at the hut of the man to whom he'd given the light bulb. To his surprise, he saw it hanging from an ordinary string in the middle of the room.

To the native's disappointment, the bulb wasn't shining. Obviously, it needed to be connected to a power source so that the electricity could flow into it.

Now, before any of us get too smug at the innocence of that African native, I wonder if some of us may be doing a similar thing ... spiritually?

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells a story concerning the importance of our "connection" to the true source of life.

Our Lord uses the analogy of a vine & branches.

Just as electricity provides the power necessary for a bulb to produce light, so the vine provides the flow of life necessary for the branches to produce fruit.

Listen now to Good News, as recorded by John, to you who have gathered here this morning for worship.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

**(VIDEO ... begin #24 2:04:49 & end 2:06:15)**

"I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit. You have been made clean already by the teaching I have given you. Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine.

"In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me. Those who do not remain in me are thrown out like a branch and dry up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples." (John 15:1-8)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

Jesus said, "I am the real vine & you're either connected to me, or you're not ... & if you're not, then spiritually speaking, you're dying, or dead. And if you don't watch out, a time will come when you'll be completely cut off & thrown into the fire."

A couple of introductory comments about this I AM statement. (X) It was made while Jesus was on the move, & He made it to His closest followers, unlike the other I AM statements which were said to large crowds.

Jesus & His disciples had just finished eating the Last Supper in the Upper Room. They've stepped out of the house & are passing through the gate of Jerusalem. They're going down a ravine to a familiar place where Jesus has gone before ... a garden, Gethsemane, which was located at the base of the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:32)

This isn't a long walk, about the length of Kirchoff from Wilke to Plum Grove. So, here's Jesus going through a vineyard & telling His disciples ...

"I am the real vine."

Then the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing, by way of introduction, this is the only I AM statement in which Jesus draws His Father into the imagery. "I am the real vine, & my Father is the gardener." Jesus is alluding to His **deity**.

It's another way of saying, "the Father & I ... we're the God-team." (People who insist that Jesus makes no claims about being God are just missing it.)

So, with that as background, we're going to be looking at this passage by way of  
a promise ... a challenge ... & a warning.

1<sup>st</sup> of all, the promise. When reading a passage of Scripture, we can discover the author's major theme by noting any repeated words or phrases.

If the author writes something again & again & again, he wants to make sure that we don't miss his point.

So, as you look at our Gospel lesson now, what word is repeated 7 times in those 8 verses? ... (*fruit*)

In fact, in verse 5, Jesus isn't just talking about fruit ...  
He says that we will bear "much fruit."

So, the question is, would you like to bear fruit? ...  
Do you want to bear much fruit? ... "Well, I don't know, it depends upon what you mean. What does 'fruit' mean?"

When Scripture uses the word "fruit" in this way, it has one of 2 things in mind. It's either talking about character ... the "fruit" of our personality. (*Matthew 7:16*)

Or the "fruit" we produce in the lives of other people ...  
the influence that we have on others.

Jesus is saying that He's the source of life that produces **character**, & makes an **impact** upon others ...  
so, would you like to be fruitful like that? ...

The Apostle Paul writes that when we put our trust in Christ, & His Spirit takes up residence in our lives, Jesus will begin to produce certain character fruit. This is what God wants to see in us. (X) "The Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, & self-control." (*Galatians 5:22-23*)

That's the fruit that God wants to work into the fabric of our character. If we remain in the vine, connected with Jesus, He'll produce His character in us.

Can you see that happening in your life? ...

When you got connected to the vine, what changed in your life? ... Is there a sense of peace in your life now that wasn't there before? ... Are you more patient now than you were before you came to faith? ... More joyful? ... More kind? ... More faithful? ... More loving? ...

That's the character fruit that Jesus is speaking of.

2<sup>ndly</sup>, fruitfulness also indicates the impact we have on other people. Later Jesus will say to His disciples ...

"I chose you & appointed you to go & bear much fruit."

(John 15:16)

In this instance, He's not talking about character fruit, but rather the impact we have in the lives of others.

Evidently Jesus' early followers took Him seriously. Because less than 30 years later the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church in Colossae, writes ... (X)

"This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives." (Colossians 1:6)

This brings another question, have you ever been "fruitful" in this sense of the word? ... Have you ever had the privilege of directing someone into a personal relationship with God through Christ? ...

Because there's nothing in this life that holds a candle to the significance of having that sort of impact. Nothing! In fact, Jesus on one occasion underscored this truth to His disciple Peter.

When Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> called Peter to follow Him, He used "fisherman" language ... because Peter was a fisherman. Jesus said, "Peter, leave your nets & come & follow me, don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." (Luke 5:10)

"Instead of fishing for fish you will fish for people." And so, Peter & Jesus, for the next several years spent time together throwing out the net & drawing people in. Peter saw people healed, he saw people forgiven, he saw people restored in a relationship with God, & he saw people taught spiritual truths ... it was exciting!

Then we come to the last chapter of John's Gospel. Jesus has died & been resurrected & is just about to return to Heaven. And of all of the times for Peter to lose focus ... he goes back to fishing for fish again!

And he takes 6 of the other disciples & they fish all night ... & catch absolutely nothing. (X) Morning comes & there's a person on the shore. They can't quite make out who it is because of the early morning fog.

But this individual calls out to them, "haven't you caught anything?" They yell back, "Not a thing."

So, the man on the shore instructs them, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, & you will catch some." (What a ridiculous thing to say to professional fishermen.)

But, they throw their net out on the other side of the boat ... & it gets so full of fish that they can hardly pull it onboard!

John looks at Peter, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:5-7)  
So, Peter dives into the water, (paddling the boat in would take too long) ... he can't wait to get to Jesus.

Now, there's nothing wrong with fishing.  
Jesus just wanted to underscore something with Peter ...  
"Peter, you're called to a much higher vocation.  
And if you try to replace that pursuit with anything else,  
it'll prove to be worthless & futile."

There's nothing wrong with fishing, just like there's nothing wrong with teaching school, or carpentry, or working in an office, or selling stuff, whatever your job.

But if we get so **preoccupied** with these daily tasks that we **lose sight** of our **higher calling**; if we forget that God mixes us up with people every day so that we can draw them to Jesus ... our lives will be **fruitless**.  
We'll miss out on the opportunity we're given to impact people for all eternity.

"I am the vine, & you are the branches. Those who remain in me, & I in them, will bear much fruit."

Don't you want to bear that kind of fruit? ... I do!

Let me also suggest that you start using our Sunday worship services for **something more** than yourself.



This is a great place to come & bring family & friends to learn about God ... but it's also a great place to introduce a friend, a neighbor, a work associate to Christ in a personal way.

So, I encourage you to bring someone with you.

Lastly, let me encourage you to **pray** for opportunities. This is something that I've got to do because since I'm a Pastor I hang out with all the "wrong kinds of people". I'm usually with believers & helping them move along with their faith. That's exciting, but it gives me little opportunity, like many of you have, to be in an environment where you're surrounded by people who really need Christ.

So, I've got to pray all the time, "Jesus, give me those opportunities, when I'm standing in line at the Jewel, when I'm pumping gas, when I'm out in the yard, when I'm at the Rec Center, wherever ...." You know, when I pray that, & really mean it, opportunities come.

That's something that I'm praying for us as a congregation ... because it's the one thing that we really need to do, more than anything else; (X)

it's our primary mission. (Matthew 28:19)

What would happen if we all started praying for opportunities to share our faith? What would happen if we looked for opportunities to do this at the summer block party, or the farmer's markets that will be here?

What would happen at CORNFEST? What would happen at our Christmas tree sales? We have people, lots of people, coming onto God's property here all the time; what would happen if we used these opportunities that God gives us to fulfill our mission to bear fruit? ...

That brings us to our 2<sup>nd</sup> point ... the challenge. I noted several moments ago that the word "fruit" pops up 7 times in these verses. Let me point out a 3-word phrase that we see about  $\frac{1}{2}$  dozen times ... "remain in me." In fact, the word "remain" is used in some way 10 times. This has got to be a really important concept for it to be repeated so frequently by Jesus ... "remain in me, remain in me, remain in me." It's a challenge.

But, this doesn't just happen. It requires intentionality. And if we don't do it ... we don't bear fruit.

If we don't **remain** in Christ, the character He wants to **produce** in us doesn't take **shape**. If we don't remain in Christ, then the impact He wants us to have in the lives of people doesn't happen.

Jesus will produce fruit. He's the vine.  
Our responsibility is to remain in the vine.

"Remain united to me, & I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me."

Let me illustrate this. I can't produce music out of this boom box, but I'll tell you what I can do. I can plug it in. Now watch this, I'll do it in slow motion ...

Okay, remember this visual aid. There's nothing in me that can produce music from the boom box ... but if I plug it in ... the music happens. I can't bear fruit in myself. I can't produce fruit in myself.

There's no spiritual power in my life apart from Christ.

But I do have a responsibility ... & that is to "plug in" ... to remain in Him.

Now some of you are thinking, I understand the boom box illustration ... but how do I "plug in" to Christ?

Fortunately, Jesus tells us how. He gives us 2 activities to do. "If you remain in me & my words remain in you." ... "If my words remain in you."

Okay, so where do we find Jesus' words? ... (*the Bible*)

Scripture records not only the words of Jesus, but also the words of His closest followers, who tell us what Jesus taught. If we want to "remain in Christ" we must "ingest" these words.

When Jesus uses the expression, "my words remain in you" ... He has far more in mind than just listening to a 25-minute sermon on Sunday morning. Now certainly this is a great start, but having His Word "remain in us", means reading the Bible during the week.

It means taking a piece of paper & a pen & jotting down things that speak to us as we read. It means being in a Bible study of some kind where we can discuss what we're getting out of a passage & talk about how to apply it to our life.

That's all part of what it means to have His words remain in us. This is so critical ... let's go back to the boom box illustration again. We're either plugged-in or we're unplugged with regards to God's Word.

What describes you this morning? ...

Are you a plugged-in believer? Or are you unplugged?

This concept of **remaining** suggests time spent in **God's Word**. Think about making a cup of tea.

We put water in a kettle, put it on the stove, bring it to a boil, & pour it in a cup. Then drop a tea bag in for one second ... then take it out ...

& we have a cup of tea, right? ...

No, not if we dip it for one second. We have to do what the British call "steeping." And for tea to steep the bag has to soak for at least 2 or 3 minutes.

We have to **steep** in God's Word  
if we expect it to color our lives.

Jesus goes on to say, "Then you will ask for anything you wish, & you shall have it."

This is the flipside to the 2-way communication.

God's Word speaks to us ... we speak back to Him in prayer. We ask, we present our needs, we talk to Him about a problem, we share our disappointments & hurts.

Now understand ... this isn't a "genie" promise to get whatever our whim is. Please note the context.

We're remaining in Christ; we're steeping in His Word.

And then when that happens,  
what kind of prayers do you think we'll pray? ...

We'll pray the kind of prayers that God will delight in answering ...

certainly not self-centered types of prayers.

This is what Jesus tells us we've got to do if we want to remain in Him. We soak in His Word;

we spend time in **conversation** with Him regularly.

We live today with all kinds of digital devices that are battery operated & need recharged regularly. But most of the time we're in such a hurry we don't wait for them to get a full recharge. We grab them & run. What happens? The charge runs out; the device is worthless. The battery needs a full charge if it's going to be useful.

We won't get charged up by God on a fly. If we run in & out of His presence, if we take just snippets of His Word, if it's always "hurry-up" prayer ... we'll never get the charge, we'll never have the vine producing fruit in us. All of this takes time.

Okay, we've looked at the promise, we've looked at the challenge, now let's look at the warning Jesus gives.

(X) "I am the real vine, & my Father is the gardener. He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, & he prunes every branch that does not bear fruit, so that it will be clean & bear more fruit."

"I am the real vine." In the original text it's even more emphasized ... "I am the real vine, the real one."

There are 2 parts to the gardener's job, (& these are the warnings). "He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit."

The 1<sup>st</sup> job of the gardener is to eliminate any branch that's not doing its' job. Those are strong words. What it means is that if our lives aren't marked by the character of Christ, if we're not getting transformed into His likeness, if we're not having an impact upon others through our personal witness, if there's no fruit in our lives ...

then the gardener is going to come & cut us off.

Several years ago, we had a couple of bushes at the side of our home that looked awful. Lots of dead branches in them. I cut it all way back, & last year the bushes were beautiful. What that taught me was that gardeners can't tolerate dead branches.

And this Scripture passage teaches ... neither does God.

So, if you're "dead" ... you better do something really quick. If you're not open to Jesus making His transformations through you, if you're not open to becoming a witness to His saving grace ... watch out, because that lack of fruitfulness will be dealt with.

Now the 2<sup>nd</sup> warning is a little more encouraging. It's for those who are bearing fruit. Actually, it's more of a gentle reminder. "He prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean & bear more fruit."

Fruitless branches are **cut off** ...  
& fruitful branches are **pruned**.

That means that God allows hardships, & disappointments, & trials, & sickness, & other things in our life ... not because He's a mean God ... not because His desire is to punish, but because, as our gardener, He wants us to be even more fruitful.

When our Heavenly Father looks at our life & sees that we're too busy to spend time with Him, when He looks at our life & sees that it's become too crowded with stuff, or there are relational conflicts going on unmended, when He looks at our life & sees patterns of sin that we persist in ... out come the pruning shears.

"I've got to do some cutting back. This needs your attention. Not because I want to hurt you, but because I want you to be fruitful."

Looking back, running has been a big part of my life.

A # of years ago, I was a very competitive runner.  
I ran races a couple times a month. I've got a bunch of  
trophies in a box at home from races I won,  
or did well in.

But, thinking back over those years, I notice that at  
certain times when running became the #1 priority in my  
life, when it was the most important thing, God would do  
some "pruning" & allow me to have stress fractures or  
pulled muscles in order to slow me down. God was getting  
my attention so that my focus would get back in line.

Let me ask you, what kind of a branch are you? ...  
Are you a branch that's unconnected ... you're not  
remaining in the vine, so there's no character fruit,  
there's no impact fruit? ... If that's the case,

I need to warn you with as much urgency as I can ...  
get connected with the vine.

Are you an existing branch that's not drawing life  
from the vine? Then, please get connected.

Begin today by getting back into God's Word.  
Reacquaint yourself with Him through prayer.

If you're a fruitful branch ... then your life is  
significant because, as Jesus says, (X)

"My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit."  
God loves it when His people bear fruit.

**MARANA THA**