


The True Vine
John 15.1-8


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Introduction


Imagine Roger Federer playing Novak Djokovic in the final of the Wimbledon tennis tournament, but instead of keeping his eyes on the ball, Federer keeps watching the scoreboard. What would the outcome of that match be?

What is the problem with this approach to tennis?




John 15.1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.




John 15.1-8

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.



Introduction

- This is the last of Jesus' seven 'I am' statements (6.35, 48, 51; 8.12, 9.5; 10.7-9; 10.11, 14; 11.25; 14.6; 15.1).
- There-and-then → here-and-now: First meaning, then implications!
- Who was Jesus addressing? How many Christians were there?
- Allegory with four characters...



The True Vine

'I am the true vine...' implies Jesus is replacing another 'vine'.

- Israel is often presented as an unfruitful vine (Isa 5.1-7).
- Isaiah also prophesies a new (true) fruitful vine (27.2-6).
- How many disciples did Jesus have? Why?
- Jesus claims to be that true vine – the replacement of Israel.
- The only qualified 'I am' statement: '...and my Father is the vinedresser.'

Two kinds of branches

'Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away (airei), and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes (kathairei), that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean (katharoi) because of the word that I have spoken to you.'

- Note the word play!
- Pruned if you do, pruned if you don't!
- 'in me': don't read Paul into John!
- In the transition, it is those who turn away (e.g. John 6.66)
- Those professing faith without possessing it (8.30-32, 42).
- Those like Judas (13.2, 10-11).
- How have you been pruned?

Abide: dependence

'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.'

- In the context (John 13-17) 'abide' refers to the future giving of the Spirit-Paraclete (e.g. 7.37-39, 14.16-17, 20).
- 'The Spirit inside you is better than Jesus beside you – according to Jesus Himself (John 16.7)

Abide: dependence

'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.'

You can't bear fruit by focussing on fruit (scoreboard) or trying.

"We often focus on the wrong end of the branch!"



Performance vs Relationship

'Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.'

- Note the progression: 'fruit' (15.2), 'more fruit' (15.2), 'much fruit' (15.5).
- 'Fruitfulness is an infallible mark of true faith.' – DA Carson
- Those not rightly connected to the vine can do much, but nothing of eternal value.
- Relationship and performance = cause and effect!

Performance vs Relationship

John 15.6 'If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.'

John 6.37 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out (ou mē ekbalō).'

Conclusion

The goal of discipleship is

1. connecting others to Jesus, not to yourself.
2. abiding in Jesus and so bearing fruit.

The Word and prayer are key:

'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.'