

FINDING THE MESSIAH

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



JOHN 15:1-17

Abiding in Christ

DAY ONE Observation

John 1-12 record the public ministry of Jesus to the nation, while chapters 13-17 record the private ministry of Jesus with His disciples. Those who find the Messiah are taught what it means to follow Him.

The culture of the vine was one of the common occupations of that day in Palestine. Vineyards were everywhere, and it may be that they passed several on the road from Jerusalem to Gethsemane. The vine was also known as the emblem of their own nation, just as the eagle is the emblem of the United States.

—Merrill Tenney

Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read John 15:1-17. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Record the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.

“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, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵“I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

⁹“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.
¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

¹¹ “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, that you love one another. (NKJV)

Who is the true vine? _____

Who is the vinedresser? _____

Who are the branches? _____

How does a branch bear fruit? (15:4) _____

How does a branch bear more fruit? (15:2) _____

How is the Father glorified? (15:8) _____

Circle the word “abide.” How many times is it used in this passage? _____

Based on the analogy of the vine, what do you think it means to “abide” in Christ?

What are some of the “fruit” that come from abiding in Christ? (15:9-17)

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

There is much debate on how to interpret Jesus' analogy in 15:1-8. Though almost all agree that the main point of the analogy is that *fruit-bearing comes from abiding in Christ*, there are many different opinions on how to interpret various aspects of the analogy, particularly the *branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away* (15:2).

Go to blueletterbible.org and type "John 15:2" into the "Search the Bible" box. Next click on John 15:2 to bring up the verse in the Greek (or select "Interlinear" from the Tools menu). Find the word "taketh away" and click on the Strong's number (G142) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in other passages in the New Testament.

What is the Greek word for "take away"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (see Strong's) _____

This is a case where how one translates the word can impact its interpretation. What is another way that this word could be translated in John 15:2 (see 1A in Outline of Biblical Usage)?

In interpreting the analogy of the vine, it is also important to go back to the Old Testament. One of the key OT passages on the vine is found in Isaiah 5:1-7. **Read Isaiah 5:1-7.**

Who is the vinedresser? (5:1) _____

What did the vinedresser do for the vineyard? (5:2) _____

What was the vinedresser looking for? (5:2-4) _____

What did the vineyard produce? (5:2-4) _____

What is the response of the vinedresser? (5:5-6)? _____

Who does the vineyard represent? (5:7) _____

Jesus is the **true vine**. Those attached to Him will produce fruit over time, bringing God glory. Those who reject Him will face judgment, just as the vineyard did in Isaiah 5. This is the overall message of John 15. In trying to understand the particulars, we must not forget the main point.

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on John*.

15:1-6. These verses, we must carefully remember, contain a parable. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule which applies to all Christ's parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. The mistakes into which Christians have fallen by neglecting this rule, are neither few nor small.

We are meant to learn first, from these verses, that *the union between Christ and believers is very close*. He is "the Vine," and they are "the branches."

The union between the branch of a vine and the main stem, is the closest that can be conceived. It is the whole secret of the branch's life, strength, vigor, beauty, and fertility. Separate from the parent stem, it has no life of its own. The sap and juice that flow from the stem are the origin and maintaining power of all its leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit. Cut off from the stem, it must soon wither and die.

The union between Christ and believers is just as close, and just as real. In themselves believers have no life, or strength, or spiritual power. All that they have of vital religion comes from Christ. They are what they are, and feel what they feel, and do what they do, because they draw out of Jesus a continual supply of grace, help, and ability. Joined to the Lord by faith, and united in mysterious union with Him by the Spirit, they stand, and walk, and continue, and run the Christian race. But every jot of good about them is drawn from their spiritual Head, Jesus Christ.

...We are meant to learn, secondly, from these verses, that *there are false Christians as well as true ones*. There are "branches in the vine" which appear to be joined to the parent stem, and yet bear no fruit. There are men and women who appear to be members of Christ, and yet will prove finally to have had no vital union with Him.

There are myriads of professing Christians in every Church whose union with Christ is only outward and formal. Some of them are joined to Christ by baptism and Church-membership. Some of them go even further than this, and are regular communicants and loud talkers about religion. But they all lack the one thing needful. Notwithstanding services, and sermons, and sacrament, they have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ, and Christ in them. Their union with Him is only nominal, and not real. They have "a name to live," but in the sight of God they are dead.

...We are meant to learn, thirdly, from these verses, that *the fruits of the Spirit are the only satisfactory evidence of a man being a true Christian*. The disciple that "abides in Christ," like a branch abiding in the vine, will always bear fruit.

He that would know what the word "fruit" means, need not wait long for an answer. Repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, holiness of life and conduct, these are what the New Testament calls "fruit." These are the distinguishing marks of the man who is a living branch of the true Vine. ...The Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus will always make Himself known in the daily conduct of those in whom He dwells. The Master Himself declares, "Every tree is known by his own fruit." (Luke 6:44.)

We are meant, lastly, to learn from these verses, that *God will often increase the holiness of true Christians by His providential dealings with them.* "Every branch," it is written, "that bears fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

The meaning of this language is clear and plain. Just as the gardener prunes and cuts back the branches of a fruitful vine, in order to make them more fruitful, so does God purify and sanctify believers by the circumstances of life in which He places them. Trial, to speak plainly, is the instrument by which our Father in heaven makes Christians more holy.

...Let us learn to be patient in the days of darkness, if we know anything of vital union with Christ. Let us remember the doctrine of the passage before us, and not murmur and complain because of trials. Our trials are not meant to do us harm, but good. God chastens us "for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness." (Heb. 12:10.) Fruit is the thing that our Master desires to see in us, and He will not spare the pruning knife if He sees we need it. In the last day we shall see that all was well done.

15:7-11. Now what are the inducements which the Lord Jesus holds out to His people, to make them aim at eminent holiness? This is a question which ought to be deeply interesting to every pious mind. Who would not like to be a singularly useful and happy servant of Christ? The passage before us throws light on the subject...

...To abide in Christ means to keep up a habit of constant close communion with Him--to be always leaning on Him, resting on Him, pouring out our hearts to Him, and using Him as our Fountain of life and strength, as our chief Companion and best Friend. To have His words abiding in us, is

to keep His sayings and precepts continually before our memories and minds, and to make them the guide of our actions and the rule of our daily conduct and behavior.

Christians of this stamp, we are told, shall not pray in vain. Whatever they ask they shall obtain, so long as they ask things according to God's mind. No work shall be found too hard, and no difficulty insurmountable. Asking they shall receive, and seeking they shall find. ...It is written in a certain place, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (Jm. 5:16.)

Now, why is there so little power of prayer like this in our own time? Simply because there is so little close communion with Christ, and so little strict conformity to His will. Men do not "abide in Christ," and therefore pray in vain. Christ's words do not abide in them, as their standard of practice, and therefore their prayers seem not to be heard. They ask and receive not, because they ask amiss. Let this lesson sink down into our hearts. He that would have answers to his prayers, must carefully remember Christ's directions. We must keep up intimate friendship with the great Advocate in heaven, if our petitions are to prosper.

...Would we know why so many professing Christians have little comfort in their religion, and go fearing and doubting along the road to heaven? The question receives a solution in the saying of our Lord we are now considering. Men are content with a little Christianity, and a little fruit of the Spirit, and do not labor to be holy in all of life. They must not wonder if they enjoy little peace, feel little hope, and leave behind them little evidence. The fault lies with themselves. God has linked together holiness and happiness; and what God has joined together we must not think to put asunder.

...Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The Christian who is careful over his words and tempers and works, will generally be the most happy Christian. "Joy and peace in believing" will never accompany an inconsistent life. It is not for nothing that our Lord concludes the passage--"These things have I spoken unto you, that your joy might be full."

15:12-17. Three weighty points demand our attention in this passage. On each of these the language of our Lord Jesus Christ is full of striking instruction.

We should observe first, *how our Lord speaks of the grace of brotherly love.*

He returns to it a second time, though He has already spoken of it in the former part of His discourse. He would have us know that we can never think too highly of love, attach too much weight to it, labor too much to practice it. Truths which our Master thinks it needful to enforce on us by repetition, must needs be of first-class importance.

...He supplies the *highest standard* of love--"Love one another as I have loved you." No lower measure must content us. The weakest, the lowest, the most ignorant, the most defective disciple, is not to be despised. All are to be loved with an active, self-denying, self-sacrificing love. He that cannot do this, or will not try to do it, is disobeying the command of his Master.

...We should observe, secondly, *how our Lord speaks of the relation between Himself and true believers.* He says,

What stands out to you from Ryle's words? Why?

"Henceforth I call you not servants...but I have called you friends."

This is indeed a glorious privilege. To know Christ, serve Christ, follow Christ, obey Christ, work in Christ's vineyard, fight Christ's battles, all this is no small matter. But for sinful men and women like ourselves to be called "friends of Christ," is something that our weak minds can hardly grasp and take in. The King of kings and Lord of lords not only pities and saves all those who believe in Him, but actually calls them His "friends." We need not wonder, in the face of such language as this, that Paul should say, the "love of Christ passes knowledge." (Ephes. 3:19.)

...We should observe, lastly, *how our Lord speaks of the doctrine of election.* He says, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, that you should go and bring forth fruit." The choosing here mentioned is evidently twofold. It includes not only the election to the Apostolic office, which was peculiar to the eleven, but the election to eternal life, which is the privilege of all believers.

...God must begin the work of grace in a man's heart, or else a man will never be saved. Christ must first choose us and call us by His Spirit, or else we shall never choose Christ. Beyond doubt, if not saved, we shall have none to blame but ourselves. But if saved, we shall certainly trace up the beginning of our salvation, to the choosing grace of Christ. Our song to all eternity will be that which fell from the lips of Jonah--"Salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2:9.)

