

What does the vine metaphor mean?

- Part of the extended teaching time with his disciples before crucified (Jn 13-17).
- Using a familiar illustration from agriculture. Vineyard and fruit – grapes.
- Some say Jesus was walking in a vineyard with his disciples outside city.
- This is an, “extended” metaphor, (some say it is more of a parable) – to make a main point, tip – to not get too wrapped up in each little detail.

The major elements of the metaphor

1. Jesus is the vine

- He is the **source** of our spiritual strength and power. We rely on him. Apart from him we can do nothing (4-5). Apart from him we cannot bear fruit.
- He is also the **pattern** for us. We look to how he loved and abided in the Father to show us the way. “I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” His love and dependence on Father is the pattern for our abiding in him.
- **As the source/pattern...we are dependent** on him, we live Christian life in his power/strength not our own. As a branch is connected to vine.

2. The Father is the vinedresser

- **Vinedresser** – Job was to tend to the vine—was to clean, and prune.
 - Purpose of cleaning was to lift the branches off ground—affix them so they could grow/thrive.
 - Purpose of pruning was to take off the unfruitful branches so that the vine would produce more lasting, vibrant fruit.

3. Jesus’ followers are the branches (us)

- We are to abide in him and his love, doing his will – and so we will bear fruit, resulting in God’s glory and our full joy.

Point - this metaphor is teaching the importance of abiding in Jesus in order to bear fruit.

Questions for discussion as you read the passages

1. How did Israel fail to be the true vine? What are the consequences of this failure?
 - Turned degenerate, went after other gods, heart became false, became prideful when prosperous.
 - Destroyed by fire, lamentation, other nations overcame them, exile.

2. What do we learn about God from these verses?

- He is watching and taking account.
- He sends other nations to judge.
- He's just and jealous for his name.
- He disciplines his people
- He set them up for success and gave grace and blessings.

Question: After reading and answering #1 & 2, brainstorm together - how has Jesus, the True Vine, succeeded where Israel failed? How has Jesus fulfilled this Old Testament metaphor?

- Great promise in Isaiah 27:6 – whole world filled with fruit of blessings.
- Jesus obeyed, loved God fully – Israel did not.
- Jesus is the vine that remained true to God – Israel did not remain true to the Lord.

Old Testament Background – Passages on the Vine/Vineyard

Ezekiel 15:2–6

² “Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? ³ Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? ⁴ Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? ⁵ Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! ⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

- Israel is a vine without fruit, only good for burning.
- Judgment on Jerusalem's inhabitants – it is compared to wood of the vine that is dry and not useful for anything but to be given for fuel to the fire.
- This foreshadows another siege on Jerusalem to come as a judgment.
- They will know that I am the Lord who will “set his face against them” and desolate the land because of their unfaithfulness (7-8).

Ezekiel 19:10–14

¹⁰ Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the water, fruitful and full of branches by reason of abundant water. ¹¹ Its strong stems became rulers' scepters; it towered aloft among the thick boughs; it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches. ¹² But the vine was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground; the east wind [Babylonians?] dried up its fruit; they were stripped off and withered. As for its strong stem, fire consumed it. ¹³ Now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. [exile] ¹⁴ And fire has gone out from the

stem of its shoots, has consumed its fruit, so that there remains in it no strong stem, no scepter for ruling. This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation.”

- May be a reference to Zedekiah, who played power politics and ended in disaster.
- “Judah prospered as a luxuriant vine (v. 10), with strong power and eminence (v. 11). God plucked up the vine in judgment, desolating her (v. 12; cf. 13:11–13), exiling her (v. 13), and leaving no strong king (v. 14)” (MacArthur)

Jeremiah 2:21

²¹ Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?

- God planted it pure.
 - They turned it wild, degenerate.
- “God **planted** Israel in the Promised Land (Ex. 15:17) out of **pure seed**. Yet Israel has become a **wild vine** that bears only putrid fruit...The Septuagint [Greek version of Hebrew OT] of this verse reads, “Yet I planted you a fruitful vine, all true.” This probably is the background for Jesus’ words in John 15:1, “the true vine”: he claims to embody the genuine people of God, unlike the Israelites of Isaiah’s day.” (ESVSB)

Jeremiah 12:10

¹⁰ Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard; they have trampled down my portion; they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.

- Many kings and leaders of other countries have attacked and destroyed Israel. Evil neighbors of other countries.
- Yet it is the hand of the Lord that did this, “I have forsaken my house” (7) “sword of the Lord devours” (12) “fierce anger” (13).

Hosea 10:1–2

¹ Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. ² Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.

- They set up idol worship in Northern kingdom, Israel. Altars in the capitol cities.
- The calf, the idol will be carried to Assyria (6), and Israel will be put to shame.

Two “vineyard songs” in Isaiah.

Isaiah 5:1–7

“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to

yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? ⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. ⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!"

- God did everything to provide for these vines.
- But they only produced wild grapes – good for nothing, no fruit.
- So God abandoned the care of the vineyard (5-6). "Make it a waste" Judgment.
- **This Passage:** Symbolizes God's care, love and... Israel's rebellion and rejection of God – and the consequence of exile.

Isaiah 27:2–6

- Focus is on promises of God, whereas Isaiah 5 focuses on the consequences of sin

² In that day, "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! ³ I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day; ⁴ I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briars to battle! I would march against them, I would burn them up together. ⁵ Or let them lay hold of my protection, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me." ⁶ In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.

- Note also God's loving care, his desire for peace with his people.
- Promise of better days to come – whole world will be filled with fruit (6).
- How is this fulfilled?
 - Points toward Christ and his working through the NT people of God.
- Through Christ all who have faith in him are the people of God. People of God are Jews and non-Jews who have faith in Jesus.
- Through God's mercy and grace – we are unified in Christ, have the Spirit, and all who have faith in Christ are grafted into God's vine, his people.
- This people will make disciples of all nations and, "cover the whole world with fruit." (Is 27:6).

Some say that this is a prophecy of the prosperity of Israel during the millennium...whole earth filled with its fruit and blessings.

- “In the Millennium Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.” (MacDonald)
- “fill the whole world. In the future kingdom of the Messiah, restored Israel will rule with Him and fill the earth with the fruit of righteousness and peace.” (MacArthur)

Point: Jesus is saying he is the true vine, the Israel of the OT, he succeeded where Israel failed and has opened up a way of “peace” with God the gardener, for all people who trust him!

Psalm 80:7–18

⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved! ⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹ You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. ¹¹ It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.

- This passage is a prayer, a plea for restoration for the people, for salvation.
- Reflects on how God did all this – brought Israel out of Egypt, drove out nations and planted Israel in the land. Cleared ground, filled land, shade, branches to river.
- Set it all up for success. Then asks, why have you done this, walls broken down?

¹² Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. ¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, ¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. ¹⁶ They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!

- Left it unprotected so that the vine is eaten by passersby and wild boars!
- Pleading that the Lord would look down and have regard for his vine, his people!
- Israel has been planted, is the son of God that he has made strong.
- An imprecation for those nations that have destroyed Israel (16).

¹⁷ But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! ¹⁸ Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!”

- Desire to remain true to the Lord, calling on his name, asking for life!
- Immediate context refers to Israel and its king.
- But continuing context is that it refers to the “son of man” made strong for God.
- Ps 110:1 “sit at my right hand (Jesus) until I make your enemies my footstool.”
- “after providing purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high” (Heb 1:3).

- “Christ offered himself as the sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” (Hebrews 10:12).

“The **man at your right hand** is usually a king (110:1; cp. Is 45:1) who received divine appointment and approval. In the NT, Christ is seated at the right hand of God, identical with God in authority, power, and holiness (Heb 1:3).” (CSBSB)

“Such tender care by God for his prized plants makes their sin against grace all the more heinous. God was faithful to redeem his people in the past by transplanting them as a tender shoot from Egypt to the Promised Land (Ps. 80:8–11). Changing metaphors, Asaph assures that the Father will restore vitality to his favored “son” in the future (vv. 14–18). While Israel is the immediate referent, the Son of Man eventually fulfilled all righteousness for God’s people (Matt. 2:15).” (Ware)

Point: Jesus is the answer to the plea “give us life” He was the sacrifice, defeated sin and death on our behalf that we might have eternal life and peace with God. (Rom 5:1-2)

Applications from John 15

John 15:1–11 (ESV)

¹ “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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. 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. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I 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 be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

What does Jesus want us to do?

3 main things, but all connected

1. Abide in Jesus (4)

- Main command of passage.

- Word used 11x in John 15.
- It is translated “remain” “continue” “dwell” “remain in union” “ABIDE”
- BDAG “an inward enduring personal communion”
- **Union** – connected to vine AND **Communion** – an enduring, life-giving relationship.
- **Live in him and let him live in you, make your home in his presence.**

2. Bear much fruit (8)

- Some see a progression... bear “fruit” (2a) God prunes – “more fruit” (2b) abide in him/he in us “much fruit” (5).

3. Abide in Christ’s love (9) – which is keeping Jesus commandments (10)

- Loving Jesus, living in a love relationship with him is linked with doing his will, following his desires for your life, keeping his commands.
- Look to Jesus’ example: Christ’s love and obedience to the Father is our **pattern/example**.
- **How did Jesus abide in the Father’s love and obey the Father? (look at cross)**
 - Obeyed fully “obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Php 2:8)
 - Obeyed joyfully “for the joy set before him endured the cross” (Heb 12:2)
 - Delighted to please the Father, loved to please him

For the road: What promises can we cling to in this passage?

BIG IDEA

Jesus fulfilled the OT metaphor of the vine. Jesus provides true, genuine nourishment—he provides spiritual sustenance and power.

When we feel spiritually dry, weary, and unconnected, Jesus gives us the strength to thrive and the power to be fruitful Christians – for we cannot bear fruit apart from him.

FOR THE ROAD

1. How specifically can you abide in Jesus more deeply and fully? List ideas and pick one of them to work on this week.
2. Look again at the list of promises in this passage in John 15:1-11. Do any of the promises stand out to you as particularly encouraging or meaningful? Why?
3. Read this quote by Gregg Matte about pruning,

“The gardener’s role is essential to the health of the plant. Similarly, the Father’s role in our lives is indispensable. Though He clips away, remember that He is our loving Father. Each clip and each trim is symbolic of His patient and edifying love for us. He trims so that we will look more like Jesus. The Father’s role has the pointed goal of our bearing fruit. He has the end in sight, not just the comfort of the moment. The Gardener prunes our branches from a place of deep, eternal love for us. He sees beyond the fleeting moment of pain and looks forward to a day when we will bear more fruit as a result of the trim. God loves tomorrow’s fruit more than today’s leaves, so he clips.”

How have you seen God’s pruning work in your life?