

Vine/Branches

8.20.17

Target text:

Our text today, with context, is found at John chapter 15, verses 1-11. First, the verses we focus on today:

15 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

² Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

³ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

⁸ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

⁹ As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

¹⁰ If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

¹¹ These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

Context:

Then, the context of these verses and for that I think it helpful to take a look at what Matthew Henry has to say:

It is generally agreed that Christ's discourse in this and the next chapter was at the close of the last supper, the night in which he was betrayed, and it is a continued discourse, not interrupted as that in the foregoing chapter was; and what he chooses to discourse of is very pertinent to the present sad occasion of a farewell sermon. Now that he was about to leave them, (1) they would be tempted to leave him, and return to Moses again; and therefore he tells them how necessary it was that they should by faith adhere to him and abide in him. (2) They would be tempted to grow strange one to another; and therefore he presses it upon them to love one another, and to keep up that communion when he was gone which had hitherto been their comfort. (3) They would be tempted to shrink from their apostleship when they met with hardships; and therefore he prepared them to bear the shock of the world's ill will.

As to Henry's point #1, you will see in the verses I read earlier the word "abide" appears nine times in 11 verses.

As to Henry's point #2, the immediate verse following our text, that being Verse 12, says: **This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.** That theme carries on for several verses, so we find at Verse 17: **These things I command you, that ye love one another.**

Then, and as to Henry's point #3, beginning at Verse 18 and continuing into the next chapter we read of the "hardships" to be faced at the hands of this world. A few samples of that theme are: **If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.** (John 15:18). **They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that**

whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. ((John 16:2-7).

For more insight into context, please consider the following remarks from Benson:

Our Lord having gone with his disciples to the mount of Olives, employed the remaining hours of his ministry in delivering to them a long and most excellent discourse, recorded in this and the following chapter. This discourse he began with the parable of the vine, taken probably from the vines that were growing around them on the mount of Olives.

And, finally, I'm hopeful what commentator Barnes has to say will also be of some help:

Some have supposed that this discourse was delivered in the room where the Lord's Supper was instituted, and that, as they had made use of wine, Jesus took occasion from that to say that he was the true vine, and to intimate that his blood was the real wine that was to give strength to the soul. Others have supposed that it was delivered in the temple, the entrance to which was adorned with a golden vine (Josephus), and that Jesus took occasion thence to say that he was the true vine; but it is most probable that it was spoken while they were going from the paschal supper to the Mount of Olives. Whether it

was suggested by the sight of vines by the way, or by the wine of which they had just partaken, cannot now be determined. The comparison was frequent among the Jews, for Palestine abounded in vineyards, and the illustration was very striking.

With that, you have an idea of the circumstances surrounding today's focus text, to which we now turn our attention.

Back to Focus Text:

To start off, I find good the following commentaries:

I am as the vine, you are as the branches: without the continual influence of the vine upon the branches, they bring forth no fruit; but that influence continuing, no plant is more fruitful than a vine is: so without the continual influence of my Spirit of grace upon you, you will be altogether barren and unfruitful; but if you have that influence, you will not be fruitful only, but very fruitful: for without my continuing such influence, you will not only be able to do little, but you will be able to do nothing that is truly and spiritually good and acceptable in the sight of God. [Matthew Poole]

I am the vine, ye are the branches,.... Christ here repeats what he said of himself, "the vine", for the sake of the application of "the branches" to his disciples: which expresses their sameness of nature with Christ; their strict and close union to him; and the communication of life and grace, holiness and fruitfulness, of support and strength, and of perseverance in grace and holiness to the end from him. [John Gill]



Itemized Takeaways:

Against this backdrop, please consider these thoughts –

- What a relatively simple thing it is to be a branch. The branch grows out of the vine and there it lives and grows and, in due time, bears fruit. It has no responsibility except to receive sap and nourishment from the branch. **But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.** (2 Corinthians 11:3; emphasis added). Our flesh is weak and we at times are weary, faint and inclined to complain that there is too much work and not enough time. But the reality is: **Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall**

find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30; emphasis added). The word translated “easy” there means “manageable, mild, pleasant.”

- The branch is utterly dependent on the vine. The branch has nothing; it just depends on the vine for everything. Our absolute dependence on God is a most solemn and precious concept. **In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.** (Psalm 62:7). **My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.** (Psalm 121:2-3).
- The vine has to do a great work. It must send its roots out into the soil and hunt under the ground, seeking nourishment and moisture. Then the roots or stems turn the moisture and nutrients into the special sap which makes the fruit that is borne. The vine does that work, and the branch has only to receive the sap from the vine. Jesus, of course, did a great work for his people, culminating this way: **After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.** (John 19:28-30). Along these lines, hear more from Barnes:

The word "true," here, is used in the sense of real, genuine. He really and truly gives what is emblematically represented by a vine. The point of the comparison or the meaning of the figure is this: A vine yields proper juice and nourishment to all the branches, whether these are large or small. All the nourishment of each branch and tendril passes

through the main stalk, or the vine, that springs from the earth. So Jesus is the source of all real strength and grace to his disciples. He is their leader and teacher, and imparts to them, as they need, grace and strength to bear the fruits of holiness.

- The life of a branch is not only a life of entire dependence on the vine, but also of deep restfulness. Not slothfulness; not laziness; but restfulness. **Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.** (Psalm 119:165). **And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.** (Isaiah 32:17). **And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:7). This type of inner peace, reserved for the people of God, is incomparably restful and can only come from the Jesus-vine. (Recall Sam's recent sermon on peace).
- A branch is unique to the vine, tree or plant. To the trained, educated eye, it is easy to differentiate the branch of a maple tree from a branch on a grape vine, for example. Those that are favored to serve as a branch to this **true vine** (John 15:1) are easily spotted. **But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.** (1 Peter 2:9). **And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.** (Revelation 5:10). **Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.** (Exodus 19:5, 6). They even smell different. **For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that**

perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:15, 16).

- The branch is fruitful. Christ repeated the word “fruit” often in this parable. He spoke, first, of **fruit** (John 15:2), then of **more fruit** (*Id*) and ultimately of **much fruit** (John 15:5, 8). God’s children are ordained to be very fruitful. **Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.** (John 15:8). And the fruit is unique to the heavenly vine. This vine we read of in this parable gives the fruit its particular presentation, flavor and taste. There is a life, a love, a spirit, a blessing and a power for men that are entirely heavenly and divine and nothing less than the sap that flows from this vine can produce such fruit.
- Our parable displays close communion. The life of **every branch** (John 15:2) is a life of close communion with the **true vine** (John 15:1). The branch abides with the vine every minute of the day; indeed, these branches are in close communion, in unbroken communion, with this vine. This close communion includes close fellowship with Christ in secret prayer; hourly, daily.
- These branches are fit for nothing in and of themselves. **As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.** (John 15:4). Fit for nothing; useless; depraved. **Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.** (Song 2:15). “Tender” denotes soft or delicate in substance; weak in constitution; not hard, tough, strong or hardy. Such describes God’s people on their own in his wilderness; they must have the vine.
- This true vine is wholesome and life-giving. It stands in stark contrast with Satan’s vine. **For their rock is not as our Rock, even our**

enemies themselves being judges. For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures? To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. (Deuteronomy 32:31-35). These competing vines symbolize the great struggle of God's covenant and encompass God's great judgment and wrath on his sworn enemies. In the context of the epic Exodus from Pharaoh's oppression, we read of God's judgment on this bad vine: **He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost.** (Psalm 78:47). And similarly, we read in Psalm 105:33: **He smote their vines also and their fig trees; and brake the trees of their coasts.**

- The vine metaphor also speaks to characteristics of Christ. Consider Dr. Gill's remarks in that regard (which we pick up in mid-Gill-sentence):

[F]or though Christ may be compared to a vine for its tenderness, weakness, and being subject to cuttings and prunings; all which may express his outward meanness in his birth, parentage, and education, which exposed him to the contempt of men; the weakness of the human nature in itself, his being encompassed with the infirmities of his people, and his sufferings and death for their sakes; yet he is rather called so with respect to his fruitfulness: for as the vine is a fruitful tree, brings forth and bears fruit in clusters, so Christ, as man and Mediator, is full of grace and truth, of all spiritual blessings, and exceeding great and precious promises; from him come the wine of divine love, of Gospel

truths and Gospel ordinances, the various blessings of grace, and the joys of heaven, which are the best wine reserved by him till last: Christ is the "true" vine; not that he is really and literally so, without a figure; but he is, as the Syriac renders it, "the vine of truth".

Do you remember when Jacob was dying he **called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.** (?) (Genesis 49:1). You probably recall that event generally, but I bet you might not remember that Jacob had this to say about Judah: **Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.** (Genesis 49:11). Old-time writers generally agree on the meaning here, and Benson gives the crispest overview:

It is here foretold that the tribe of Judah should inhabit a fruitful land, and especially that it should abound with milk and wine: that vines should be so common and so strong that they should tie their asses to them, and so fruitful that they should load their asses from them, wine being as plentiful as water, so that the men of that tribe should be very healthful and lively, their eyes brisk and sparkling, and their teeth white. In Christ there is plenty of all that which is nourishing and refreshing to the soul, and which maintains and cheers the divine life in it: in him we may have wine and milk, the riches of Judah's tribe without money and without price, [Isaiah 55:1](#).

Now THAT'S health. [Matthew 21:17-20; Luke 13:6-9; Romans 11:11-25]

I love you. Amen.