

He Loved Me...

He Loves Me Lots

The Gospel of John

Text

John 15:1-17

Topic

Jesus tells a parable of the vineyard in which He is our life-giving vine and we His fruitful branches

Title

"Because You're Mine, I AM the Vine"

Stateside, he is orthopedic surgeon Joseph Alban. On the Big Island of Hawaii, he is Kona Joe.

For two weeks each month, Dr. Joe Alban heads to Hawaii's Big Island, where Kona Joe grows coffee beans on a 32-acre plantation.

He is lauded for his innovative method. Coffee plants are grown like wine grapes, lifted up off the ground on trellises.¹

Kona Joe explains, "The tree develops with more uniform sun exposure resulting in more even ripening of the coffee cherry. Sun exposed fruit is always superior."

Jesus was walking with the eleven to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He taught them a parable about the vineyard. Jesus compared believers to branches lifted up so they would have greater exposure to the Son of God. This *spiritual* 'trellising' would result in maximum fruitfulness.

¹The plantation was featured on the History Channel program, *Modern Marvels* (Season 12, Episode 51).

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Jesus Promised To Be Your Fruiter** (Yes, that's a thing), and **#2 Jesus Is Pleased To Be Your Friend.**

#1 - Jesus Promised To Be Your Fruiter (v1-11)

Did you know - *because I didn't* - that olive trees have been planted in and around vineyards for thousands of years?

Vineyards were all around them on their walk to the Mount of Olives.

Joh 15:1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that this is the last of seven "I AM" statements in the Gospel of John. "I AM the bread of life," "I AM the light of the world," "I AM the door of the sheep," "I AM the resurrection and the life," "I AM the good shepherd," "I AM the way, the truth, and the life," and "I AM the true vine."

Jesus had great situational awareness. Seeing the vineyards, He used them to capture the teachable. moment.

David Guzik writes, *"The vine and branch picture emphasizes complete dependence and the need for constant connection. The branch depends on the vine even more than the sheep depends on the shepherd or the child depends on the father."*

Since Jesus was about to depart from His disciples, this was super encouraging.

The word, "fruit," occurs eight times in these seventeen verses. God desires that your life be spiritually fruitful, and He works tirelessly to that end.

Joh 15:2 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.

Joh 15:3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

This scares me!

If I am a branch "that does not bear fruit," will I be "taken away?" Will I be "cast out" and, once "withered," "throw[n] into the fire, and burned?"

The number one rule in real estate is "location, location, location." I put forward that a top five rule of Bible reading is "context, context, context."

This parable teaches total dependence upon Jesus to produce fruit. It isn't a warning that if you don't do your part you will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

"Takes away," and "prunes" are the vinedresser's actions we must address.

Let's start with "prunes." If you look it up in *Strong's Concordance*, the words *clean* or *cleanses* are listed as alternatives. The Strong's number for that Greek word is G2508, and the word derives from Strong's number G2513.

In the very next verse, Jesus says "you are already clean." "Clean" is the same Strong's number G2513. It makes more sense than "prunes," since the word is used twice in the same context.

Jesus was therefore talking about *cleansing* branches, *not* pruning them. Grape vines are often washed with water before harvesting, to get the dust and dirt and insects off them before harvest.

Remember the foot washing Jesus performed on His guys? He told them they were "clean," meaning saved. The cleansing of the vine is another illustration for being saved.

The words, "takes away," can be translated, *to lift up, to raise. That is exactly how grapes are grown.*

The vinedresser tends the vine by lifting up branches and putting them on a trellis. He does it for greater exposure to the sun, for maximum fruit.

Joh 15:4 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.

Joh 15:5 "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.

Joh 15:6 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.

Commentators say that you are saved, but only if you "abide." Fail to "abide," they warn, and you'll find yourself ashes in an ag burn.

"Abide in Me, and I in you." Let's ask two questions:

1. How does Jesus abide in believers? By the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.
2. How long does the Spirit's indwelling last? In verse six of chapter fourteen, Jesus promised, "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you **forever**..."

Since having the Spirit is "forever," these verses are not about losing or forfeiting the gift of salvation. They are about fruitfulness.

"You are the branches..." totally dependent upon the vine. You can "do nothing" apart from Jesus, and that includes producing fruit.

What about those branches who do not abide and are burned? There are two positions you can hold that are perfectly biblical:

1. They are nonbelievers. Jesus described believers as abiding in Him, *and He in them*. These branches thrown into the fire never had Jesus in them. Judas Iscariot, for example.
2. The other position is that these branches are believers whose works burn at the Reward Seat of Jesus. The apostle Paul told the believers in Corinth, "Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is... If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (3:13-15).

It would seem that these verses have application to everyone, unbeliever and believer.

Joh 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

"If" is sometimes translated, "since." "Since you abide in Jesus," as a branch on a vine, you can "ask."

I "desire" craft coffee. Kona Joe... Red Elephant Coffee Company... Lanna Coffee. That isn't what Jesus meant.

Joh 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

I might desire coffee... or a Ferrari. What *should* a “branch” desire? To bear much fruit. This, then, is a promise that God will bring forth much fruit if I desire.

Joh 15:9 “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

Judas had been dismissed to betray the Lord. Peter soon would deny Him. The rest would scatter. While the Lord’s body was in the tomb, they would be filled with despair.

Against such a dark, devastating background, Jesus spoke of them “abid[ing] in [His] love.” In the darkest, most dangerous valley of the shadow of death, Jesus loves you with an everlasting, never changing love.

When we buy plants, we read the tag with instructions about sun and shade, soil conditions, and watering.

Some spiritual fruit requires harsh conditions in order to bloom and grow: Heat, drought, pests, wind, floods.

Joh 15:10 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.

We have established in our studies in the Gospel of John that it is *impossible* to “keep [His] commandments” without the help of the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit, you find that God’s “commandments” are also His enabling to obey.

In every circumstance, the Lord can produce spiritual fruit in your life, because He **is** life. Your part is to “abide,” which means *continue, dwell, endure*.

Joh 15:11 “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

“Joy” is not a word we would choose to describe those three dark days. Jesus was confident that not only could the eleven, and His other followers, “remain” in joy, but that it might be “full.”

The greatest expression of their joy would come after they received the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The apostle Peter would later write, “Although you’ve never seen Him, you love Him. Even though you don’t see Him now,

you trust Him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words" (First Peter 1:8).

We are being encouraged to fix our eyes upon Jesus in order to become lost in the oceans of His love for us, individually as Christians, and corporately as His Church.

Acknowledge that you are in Christ, and that He is in you, and endure as commanded in God's Word enabled by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus wants to *lift you up*, not *lop you off*.
A.W. Pink writes, "*Believers are never exhorted to be 'in' Christ. They are 'in' Him by new creation.* But Christians are frequently exhorted to abide in Christ, because this privilege and experience may be interrupted. To abide, continue, dwell, remain 'in' Christ has always reference to the maintenance of fellowship with God in Christ. The word abide calls us to vigilance."

#2 - Jesus Is Pleased To Be Your Friend (v12-17)

The article on a popular Christian blog is titled, *Casual Church - What Happened to Christian Reverence?*

The author writes, "*What happened to reverence? Has God not the right to ask many professing Christians today, as he did the negligent priests of Israel, 'A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?'*" (Malachi 1:6).

I get it. There is a line we can cross into irreverence. But casual is not synonymous with irreverent.

Two of the illustrations in the Gospel of John that describe our relationship with Jesus are *family* and *friends*.

1. Jesus referred to us as "little children" (13:3).
2. Here in our verses, we are "friends."

Family and friends have a less reverent, more casual, relationship with one another.

I think of the Lord, mostly, as my Friend.

Joh 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Not possible to "love" as Jesus loved without the Holy Spirit indwelling. Good thing He is in you once you are born again. He is part of the transaction of your salvation. You believe, you are born again, the Holy Spirit immerses you into the Christian life, and He indwells you, forever.

Joh 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Jesus laid His life down for more than His friends. In Romans 5:7-9, we read, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

There is no contradiction. Norman Geisler writes, *"Jesus died for both His friends (His disciples) and His enemies. In fact, His "friends" were enemies when He died for them. There is no contradiction here, since the text does not say that Christ died only for His friends. He did die for those who would become His friends, but He also died for those who would remain His enemies."*

"God so loved the world." He draws all men to Himself. He is Savior of all - especially those who believe.

Joh 15:14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

John Gill writes, *"Not that their doing of the commandments of Christ... made them His friends; or was the reason and motive of His laying down His life for them, and showing Himself in such a friendly manner to them: but the sense is, that by observing His commands from a principle of love, they would make it appear that they were His friends, being influenced by His grace, and constrained by a sense of His love in dying for them."*

Joh 15:15 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.

The Christian life calls for flexibility. You remain servants, but are simultaneously friends. God expects us to wear a lot of hats. I think sometimes we have the wrong

hat on for the task before us. We shouldn't wear beanies when hard hats are necessary.

By His sharing with them the Father's words, they had become friends.

We have the Father's words, the complete Bible, containing everything we need to live a life of godliness. We know the future.

Beloved, you are the friend of God.

Joh 15:16 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.

Jesus chose these men as His disciples. They would have born much fruit in the Kingdom of God on Earth had Israel received Jesus as Messiah. They would yet bear much fruit establishing the Church in His absence.

Once more I urge us to understand the comfort these words should have brought the eleven. Jesus was prophesying their fruitful future at a time they thought all was lost.

Where this verse can create controversy is in relation to how, or if, Jesus "chooses" people to become born again; and how, or if, the free will of those persons comes into play.

The Lord was not suddenly pivoting to discuss the Doctrine of Election. There is nothing here to indicate we are dealing with election to salvation or damnation. Context, context, context. Don't read into the text what isn't there.

To again quote A.W. Pink, *"The central theme then is not salvation, how it is to be obtained or the danger of losing it. Instead, the great theme here is fruit bearing, and the conditions of fertility."*

Joh 15:17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

D.L. Moody said, *"If we have got the true love of God shed abroad in our hearts, we will show it in our lives. We will not have to go up and down the earth proclaiming it. We will show it in everything we say or do."*

It is popular at county fairs to have a largest vegetable contest. The longest zucchini ever measured 8' 3.3" and was grown by Giovanni Batista Scozzafava in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

We read the stories in the Bible, and in church history, and conclude God wants only the largest fruit possible. Not true.

Jesus spent His first 30 years on Earth learning obedience. Any accounts of Him doing miracles before then are false, because "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:13).

God the Father was well pleased with Jesus' obscurity in Nazareth. God isn't waiting for you to produce an 8' zucchini. He stands ready to produce His fruit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control," and the like.

Read the Word to discover how a Christian can conduct him or herself in your circumstances. For example, Peter writes, *"Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps"* (First Peter 2:18-21).

- Believe this is what you are commanded and therefore can do thanks to the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- Desire for God to produce His fruit in the situation.