

I am the Vine **John 15:1-8**

As the whale needs the ocean, so we need Jesus.

- We have seen Jesus make huge claims about our dependence upon him through the 'I am' series.
- Jesus claims to give life that satisfies the soul, life to the full, resurrection and life, life before death and beyond death. He claims to be the only way to life.
- Jesus does not claim to be a nice add-on if we want him nor only to give life beyond death – he claims to be essential for every day and forever. He is the ocean.
- Today we see another aspect of our dependence on Jesus – that we need him to be fruitful in this life.

Jesus says 'I am the true vine' – another huge claim.

- In the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 5 or Psalm 80) Israel is described as a vine.
- But Israel was mostly described as an unproductive vine or one that produced disgusting fruit.
- Jesus says he is the true vine – and the passage focuses on how we are to bear fruit.

But first, what is the fruit Jesus is talking about that we are to bear?

- What do we see in the surrounding verses that Jesus produces in his followers?
- Obedience v10, joy v11, love for one another v12 and witness to the world v27
- All of these are included in the fruit Jesus produces in us.

What does Jesus teach about being fruitful in our passage?

1. Fruitfulness is not optional v1-2

The first thing we see is the gardener with his cutters – chopping unfruitful branches.

- In view here would surely be those who call themselves Christians but who find the idea of 'following Jesus' or 'obeying Jesus' to be somewhat extreme.
 - Those who do not allow what they see in God's word to change them. Who through years of practice sit through sermons and Bible studies unmoved. Neither the warnings nor the challenges nor the comforts of the gospel hit home. Things of eternity have been read, things of infinite glory and majesty explained, but their focus is only on when the service will end, whether the songs were to their liking and whether the coffee was good.
- Jesus says – those who don't bear fruit will face the chop
 - The warning is also there in verse 6.

Jesus also says something else that God does v2

- He prunes branches – for greater fruitfulness.
- Now notice God does this to every branch that bears fruit.
- God is not content with your fruitfulness – whatever your age or stage, he wants you to be more fruitful and will do this through pruning.
- What is meant by God pruning? Well it doesn't sound pleasant does it?
 - This helps us understand the losses, the trials and struggles in life
 - They are the Lord's means to increase our fruitfulness – they aren't pleasant but we need to trust they are necessary.
 - When you meet someone who is exceptionally Godly, don't you find that often they have gone through great trials and difficulties in their lives.
 - The 2 are connected – a well pruned person becomes very fruitful.

2. The only way to bear fruit...remain in Jesus v3-5

- Verse 3 says fruitfulness is distinct from being 'made clean' – fruitfulness is not what gets you right with God, that comes first through hearing and believing the gospel.
- The main point of verses 4-5 is repeated several times. How can we bear fruit?
- Imagine a branch of a vine – if it doesn't stay attached to the vine it won't bear fruit.
- Why does Jesus emphasise this? Because we don't believe it!
- I imagine some will go away from this sermon thinking this: I don't feel I am very fruitful, so I must try harder. We focus on our lack of fruit and think we need to put more effort into producing it.
- But Jesus' big point is: you are a branch. To be fruitful, you need the vine! So don't go away focussing on producing fruit, but on remaining in Jesus, the vine!
- And the promise is that if we remain in Jesus we will bear much fruit!
- So the question then is...how, practically, do we remain in Jesus?

3. How to remain in Jesus...

We will pick out 2 things from verses 7-8

a) Soak in God's word

- Notice the parallel between verses 5 and 7.
- Jesus remains in us by his word remaining in us.
- So this comes down to spending time in the Bible.
- It is a basic question for us – are we spending time daily in God's word?
- As we read it are we reading it such that it shapes and changes us?
- As we gather on a Sunday are we listening ready to feed from, learn from and be ministered to by God's Spirit as his word is faithfully preached?
- Are we soft clay as we come to the Bible, letting the Spirit mould us?

b) Asking Jesus v7

- There is no fruitfulness without prayer – see v8
- With God's word shaping our desires we are to ask God for things.
- Sometimes prayer feels futile – but there is no other way
- So – let's not be seduced into thinking we should only pray when we feel like it.
- Corrie Ten Boom asked: Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tyre?
- Does it drive your life or do you only use it in an emergency?

So are you focussed on remaining in Jesus?

- It concerns me that some may have given up spending time in God's word and prayer either individually or corporately or both.
- Maybe you will say – I am just so busy, life is so full.
- Maybe we teach our children something similar when they are busy or stressed – when it is exam time what do we say? Don't worry about church, you have too much on, and don't worry about doing your Bible time and prayer time.
- Aren't we really saying to ourselves, and our children, that remaining in Jesus isn't essential? That other things are more important and will be more fruitful?

But Jesus challenges us. v5: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'

Take a moment and ask: What difference will what Jesus has taught us make to you?

Thinking about the whole of the 'I am' series – will you come to Jesus, asking him for life?