

1. **Introduction:** The next couple of lessons will be on the “Vine and Branches” metaphor that Jesus told to the disciples on the night He was betrayed. First, some background.
2. **NT Metaphors for Salvation:** In the New Testament there are several metaphors that indicate what it is like to experience the saving regenerating grace of God.
  - (1.) Jesus said salvation is a new beginning in life so dramatic that it is like being born again.
  - (2.) It is like having a friend who willingly gives up his life to save your life.
  - (3.) It is like a sheep having a good shepherd diligently protecting, providing for, and loving his sheep.
  - (4.) It is like a slave who is “redeemed” and freed by a friend.
  - (5.) It is like becoming a branch in a vine, drawing life from the vine.
  - Regeneration begins a new intimate never-ending relationship with God that continues from “new life in the here and now” to life in a more complete sense in the everlasting age to come.
3. **Israel as the Vine of God:** The metaphor of the true vine has deep historical significance for Israel. In Jesus’ time, the Jews prided themselves as being the chosen “Vine of God.”
  - They used the vine motif in many places. Especially dramatic and highly visible was the vine located over the entrance to the Temple. Everyone entering saw it. It was an exquisitely carved, gold-leafed vine with branches and luscious-looking grapes.
  - That beautiful vine was a magnificent reminder to the Jews of their wonderful relationship and exclusive connection to God Himself.
  - The long history of the use of a grapevine and its fruit to symbolize the relationship of Israel to its God is found in many places. A few examples: Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1-6, 19:10-14, Hosea 10:1-4, and Isaiah 5:1-7, 4:2-3, 11:1, 10-11.
4. **Two Special Examples:** (1.) In Psalm 80:8-19. Israel is described as a vine brought from Egypt and planted in a new land. It spreads widely, bearing fruit enjoyed by many.
  - But the people forgot how God brought them to their new land, and the vineyard was allowed to fall into ruin. God had warned them that to avoid difficulties, they must “remember.”
  - Failure to obey God brought danger and destruction to the vineyard of Israel. The Psalmist looks forward to Messiah coming to save the vineyard, *“But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!”* (Psalm 80:17)
  - (2.) Isaiah 5:1-7 emphasizes God’s careful planting and tending of His vineyard, Israel. God expected much righteous fruit from His chosen and carefully prepared vineyard.

- God placed it on a fertile hill, cleared away stones, planted it with choice vines, built a watchtower to protect it, and hewed out a wine vat.
  - Everything was ready and waiting for a good crop, but the vineyard produced only wild grapes. That result led God to declare He would allow His chosen vineyard to be destroyed. And destroyed it was – first by Babylonians in 586 B.C. The people were exiled to Babylon.
  - Later, Persia defeated Babylon, and the Persian King, Cyrus, allowed some exiles to return. The returnees set about establishing anew what had been destroyed.
  - After a long period of ups and down, Messiah was born, grew up, and began to minister. He was rejected by the authorities and eventually executed. Jerusalem was destroyed again in 70 A.D. by the Romans, the people in the city killed or exiled.
5. **Israel's Hope:** For hundreds of years Israel's hope for the future was based on Isaiah's prophecy of a branch, a shoot from the root of the vine, which was yet to come.
- **Isaiah 11:1, 10:** *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. <sup>10</sup>In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples- of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”*
  - **Isaiah 4:2b-3:** *“ The fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. <sup>3</sup> And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem.”*
  - Isaiah's anticipated Savior is described metaphorically as a choice vine coming from the stump of Jesse to bear the fruit Israel had failed to produce.
  - That prophecy was realized in Jesus' incarnation when He came as the True Vine. Israel's position as the Vine of God was an imperfect foreshadowing of the true vine.
  - Jesus possessed all the perfections Israel was called to develop but had never succeeded in doing. In Messiah, a new Israel would come into being. The redeemed people of the new Israel would draw their spiritual sustenance from Christ, the True Vine as His branches.
  - Paul recognizes this truth in his view of the Church as the New Israel. He compares it with the old Israel in the metaphor of an olive tree from which branches are broken off, and new ones grafted in (Romans 11:17-24).
6. **The Vine Imagery in Teaching About the Kingdom of God:** Jesus frequently used the vineyard imagery in His teaching on the Kingdom of God. For example: In Matthew 20:1-15, vineyard laborers were paid from God's generosity rather than what they earned.
- In Matthew 21:28-32, two sons were told to go work in the vineyard; one said he would go but did not; the other said he would not go yet went. Jesus used this parable to illustrate the difference between speech and action. Jesus commended the right action.

- In Mark 12:1-9 (and Matthew 21:33-44, etc.) Jesus tells a parable about an owner who sent various messengers to the tenants of his vineyard, all of whom the tenants treated badly.
  - The owner then sent his son. The wicked tenants killed the son. This illustrated rejection of the prophets and the coming rejection and death of Messiah.
7. **Israel Failed to be God's Righteous Vine:** The Old Testament reveals Israel's failure to fulfill its appointed role as the righteous vine of God. After many prophets and kings, many ups and downs, it seemed no person or no single group could fulfill the required role. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to be the True Vine that Israel failed to be.
8. **How had Israel failed:** God chose Israel to produce luscious, beautiful, choice grapes of righteousness, but instead, forgetting what God had done and ignoring their covenant with Him, Israel repeatedly produced the bad fruit of unrighteousness and rebellion.
- Now, from the stump of Jesse would come Jesus, the True Vine, who would produce the fruit of righteousness God seeks.
  - Jesus fulfilled His role as the true vine by living a perfectly obedient life under the Law and dying an atoning death in which He paid the death penalty due the unrighteousness of others.
  - Having completed the work the Father sent Him to do, Jesus became the source of all righteousness. It is instructive that we find this metaphor amid Jesus' discourses on the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is instrumental in fulfilling Christ's role as the True Vine.
9. **Jesus Tells His Disciples He is the True Vine:** As the time of His death came near, Jesus increasingly spent most of His time teaching and preparing His small group of disciples for what lay ahead. On the very night of His betrayal, Jesus spoke earnestly to His disciples of many things including that He, not Israel, is God's True Vine.
- He told them the exceptionally good news that the Holy Spirit would be sent to bond them (and all believers) to Himself in a Union, a Union as intimate as that of branches in a vine.
  - It is a Union to last through all ages and eternity. Jesus says, ***"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."*** (John 15:1) ***"I am the vine; you are the branches."*** (John 15:5a).
  - How could a relationship be more intimate? What a comforting picture Jesus paints. His life flows through the branches bringing forth the fruit of righteousness in His followers.
10. **Context of the "True Vine" Metaphor:** The declaration by Jesus that He is the true vine is the last of seven "I am" declarations recorded by John.
- In John 6:35, Jesus says, ***"I am the bread of life,"*** in 8:12 ***"I am the light of the world."***

- In John 10:9 He says, ***"I am the gate ... who enters through Me will be saved"***, in 10:11 ***"I am the good shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep,"*** in 11:25 ***"I am the resurrection and the life"*** in 14:6 ***"I am the way and the truth and the life,"*** and now in 15:1 He says, ***"I am the true vine."***
  - Each "I am" passage is a rich image. Each increases our understanding of who Jesus is and what we can become because of who He is. The "true vine" metaphor is particularly striking.
  - In no other place does Jesus show the meaning of being "in Christ" in so direct a way as in 15:5 when He says, ***"I am the true vine"*** and then immediately says ***"you are the branches."***
11. **Israel's Hope Realized:** It was about 700 years after Isaiah that Jesus declared, ***"I am the true vine."*** But those who heard Him had no doubt about what He meant. Jesus was declaring that He is the expected branch, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the choice vine that Isaiah and other prophets saw coming.
- Though Israel failed as the Vine of God, Jesus declared that He would succeed in producing the righteousness Israel failed to produce. Jesus is the new and true vine of the Lord. The Father is never disappointed when He looks for fruit from the vine of His Son.
  - As stated in Isaiah 53:2, in His human nature, Jesus grew up before God like ***"a young plant."***
  - He was perfect and beloved of His heavenly Father. In manhood when He began His ministry, He was soon despised particularly by those in authority.
  - The Father declared Jesus to be His ***"beloved Son"*** in whom He was ***"well pleased"*** (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Jesus, as the true vine, brings forth the fruit the Father seeks.
  - Jesus sacrificed Himself, becoming for those who believed the only source of righteousness apart from the Law (i.e., apart from perfect obedience all the time to the Law of Moses).
  - Without that one source of righteousness apart from the Law, no could be saved from eternal destruction. He bought salvation to many as He bore the burden and death due their sins.
  - He became the True Vine, that we might be true branches abiding fruitfully in Him.