

Bearing Fruit For Jesus

John 15:1-17

January, 4 2026

How did the grape respond when he got stepped on? He let out a little wine. Why did Momma Grape leave her family? She was tired of raisin kids! Say fruit. Wrong time of year to talk about fruit? Not really. For if you have fruit trees or grape vines, now is the time to prune them back if you want to get good fruit next fall. So it's right in line. Open your Bibles to John 15.

This morning, we kick off our theme for Antioch for 2026! Bearing Fruit for Jesus! Say it. Just like our previous themes, it comes directly from God's Word and in this case even from the lips of our Lord Himself. Jesus is still in the upper room with His disciples just after He washed their feet, shared the Love Feast and just before they left to head to Gethsemane. He only has about an hour or two left with His disciples before He will be arrested, drug from court to court, condemned, tortured, whipped, and finally crucified. These are some of His very last words to His followers. We do well to hear them afresh this morning.

If able, stand as we read them from John 15:1-17 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. **No branch** can bear fruit by itself; it **must** remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you **remain** in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he **will** bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask **whatever** you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear **much** fruit, **showing** yourselves to be my disciples. 9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now **remain** in my love. 10 If you **obey** my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that **my** joy may be in you and that **your** joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends **if** you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last.

Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

We have here one of the great passages of all the Bible. This Scripture was the theme for the CBC AMWC last July in NC and also the one suggested for CBC Sunday last October. Because we had already selected it as our theme for Antioch for 2026, we held off on it till this morning. But as we contemplate what God wants to do in us and in our congregation in the next 12 months, let us consider these direct commands from our Lord and Master Jesus.

As we begin to work our way through this passage today, let's get the roles straight. Jesus is very clear about who's who. Say True vine. Jesus is the true vine. Which implies there are false vines. Indeed there are. False vines abound. I cleared out some brush this week and the honeysuckle vine had taken over my raspberries. Honeysuckle is a beautiful vine, it grows fast, its flowers smell sweet and its nectar is like honey. But other than producing oxygen and rapidly covering the ground, honeysuckle does no earthy good. Whoever brought it to this country should be taken to Alaska to go snipe hunting.

There are false spiritual vines of cults that grow up and entangle many even worse than honeysuckle. There are also the false vines of money and wealth that many think will produce tasty fruit for them. There are false vines of personal ambition and recognition, career success, even good works. Good works are a fruit, but the true vine is Jesus Christ. He is very clear about that! You and I are not the vine. Jesus is the vine. The only true vine.

Then He tells us that His Father is the gardener. Say gardener. The vinedresser. What a shepherd is to sheep, a vinedresser is to the vineyard. He plants it, prunes it, sprays it, weeds it, mows it, picks it, etc. The two most important parts of this analogy are the True Vine, the Son, and the Gardener, The Father. Our job is not to prune and pick. In fact, it's not until verse 5 that we find **our** role. Even though some of us may look a bit like wrinkled raisins, we're not called to be grapes. We're called to produce them. If you're saved, say I'm a branch. By the way, if you're not saved, you're not even in the vineyard, but you can be. More on that later.

The Vine is the plant's main support structure. The Vine nourishes and supports the branches. (s) The vine is the main part of the plant. It is permanent. The branches come and go. They grow in one season and may be pruned off, but branches are also where the fruit is produced. And according to what He says here, Jesus and His Father want fruit! Branches that don't bear fruit get cut off, thrown into a pile and burned. You don't want that! Jesus' statement on this is very graphic and a strong warning against just taking up soil, water, and nutrients and doing nothing of lasting value for the True Vine or the Vinedresser.

Now if and when we do bear fruit, the Gardener Father prunes us back. Say prune. Pruning is different than being lopped off. Pruning involves carefully removing excess growth that actually prevents maximum fruit production. Branches like to grow out and get longer and longer, like honeysuckle, but the purpose of vineyards is not to produce branches or leaves, it is to produce grapes. If a gardener prunes back the branch, the branch will then put its energy and resources into producing fruit, not leaves. You can't eat the leaves, you can't drink leaves, you can't sell leaves. The Gardener wants fruit! And He knows just where to prune each branch for maximum production.

What does this mean for us? We can get so busy with things that don't matter that we aren't actually bearing any fruit for Jesus. We'll talk more another Sunday about some fruit

varieties like love, joy, peace, etc from Gal 5, salvation, sanctification, righteousness, holiness, etc. But it's easy to get so distracted with life that we don't actually bear any lasting fruit for Jesus. Yes, we need to work, pay bills, clean house, mow grass, etc, but how often we give all of our best and our most to these other pursuits and produce nothing for the Master. In Jesus' parable about the sower and the seeds, He warns of weeds that choke out the plants and He names those weeds life's cares, riches, and pleasures. TV, hobbies, hunting, cars, gaming, etc. Perhaps nothing wrong with any of them in and of themselves, but they're just shoots and leaves rather than good fruit.

But even in the church, we can get so busy with activities that we fail to produce fruit for Jesus. This is a besetting sin for strong growing churches like Antioch that we must beware of. Let us never mistake activity for accomplishment, events and busyness for fruit. Jesus wants fruit! What kind of fruit does He want? Vs 16 tells us it's fruit that will last. Say eternal. Not perishable like real grapes. They'll rot in a week or two. But imperishable. We may be involved in many activities, but of what **lasting** eternal value are those activities? Are we producing fruit that's just going to rot up or fruit that will last? Anything involving the Word of God will be eternal because His Word is eternal!

We'll look at some other varieties of eternal spiritual fruit another Sunday, but in this particular passage, Jesus mentions one of them 7 times in these 17 verses. Did you catch it? Say love. That's the first one listed in Galatians 5. You could be going on mission trips, teaching BLAST, preaching revivals, healing people, leading Sunday School, lots of activities, but if you're not producing love in your life, the Love Chapter says we're just a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. We're just producing leaves and shoots. Jesus wants fruit! The fruit of love!

He wants the type of love that lays down its life for others, and sometimes get stepped like the little grape we mentioned earlier. We often think of soldiers or police officers and praise God for them, but how about wives who lay down their lives to serve their families? Or husbands who do the same? Or people who sacrifice their own pleasures to prepare for a SS class or to lead music or to visit someone? Those people who serve us by visiting others, caring for us, and helping us worship don't have any more time than any of the rest of us, they just lay theirs down for us. Not because they feel coerced or guilted, but because they love Jesus and they're producing His fruit of loving others. The nourishment of the Vine of Jesus is coursing through their branch and producing love in these ways. And of course Jesus Himself demonstrated this type of fruit best when He laid down His life for us.

How can we best glorify God? By producing much fruit as verse 8 tells us. The other year our theme was glorifying God. If we want to do that, we have to bear His fruit which proves we're His disciples. Say proves. How do you know if a plant is a grapevine? If it bears grapes! How do you know someone is a follower of Jesus? When he or she bears His fruit by loving others. When he or she obeys Him. Vs 10 "If you **obey** my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. Vs 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Now I would have been in a lot better shape if He

had stopped after Love each other. But He attached a standard. A yardstick. As He has loved me. How is that? Totally, fully, 100%, I Corinthians 13 type of agape love. And ultimately He laid down His life for me. Love one another just like that, just as He loved you. The closer we get to that love, the more grade A first quality Jesus' fruit we produce.

Notice He says in verse 8 it is to His Father's glory if we bear MUCH fruit. Say much. Not just fruit. Not just some fruit. Not just a grape or two or even a cluster or two. MUCH fruit! What a joy it is for a gardener to see His vines hanging full of much ripe fruit! (s) Like these crosses hanging full. Imagine Jesus looking at Antioch and seeing so much love being produced and shared that the vine is bending. 5

And if we're going to bear much good fruit for Jesus, He says we have to stay connected to the True Vine. Say connected. Some of you are asking, How do we do that? What a great question! 1. Through prayer. Daily constant conversation with Jesus. How do you stay connected to our spouse or to our children or friends? We talk to them! Talk to Him! Tell Him what joys and fears you have about 2026, about this week, about this day! Financial, health, work, relationships, etc. And then listen to what He says back, in prayer, but also in His Word. Say Bible. 2. Read the Bible every single day! Adopt some type of Bible reading program and stick to it. Pick a book and read through it. Then another, then another. As you read, listen for God to speak. It is His Word. Don't understand it all? Welcome to the club. It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand! Like love each other. Sunday School class and Bible Studies can help us understand the Bible, and give us a chance to ask our questions. Stay connected by praying and by reading God's Word daily.

And stay connected to His Body, the Church. Say worship. Faithful attendance at worship each week provides nourishment for us to bear good fruit. I work hard to try to provide good fertilizer to help you produce good fruit. I get accused of spreading manure, but that goes with it. We can encourage and support each other. Here Jesus says He is the vine and elsewhere the Bible tells us the Church is His body, so in some respects, the church is Jesus' vine. Stay connected to Him by staying connected to His Body, the Church! Don't fall away. Don't neglect the **assembling** of yourselves together as Hebrews tells us. Say assemble. That means meeting, not just watching online. When 2 or 3 of you meet together in My name, there I am in the midst of them! Jesus said. If you want to produce more fruit, improve your connection! Stay connected to the True Vine through your prayers, through the Word, and through His Church.

For what does verse 5 tell us we can produce apart from Him? Nothing! Vs 4 No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. Vs 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. You've seen dead branches on a tree. Something severed their connection to the main plant, to the roots. We must stay connected to Jesus or we'll get burned up. We can produce NO good lasting fruit, without Him, no matter how hard we try, how hard we work, how busy we make ourselves.

Jesus makes another point in this passage as well. Staying connected to Him is vital for our prayer life. Vs 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask **whatever** you wish, and it will be given you. He repeats this in Vs 16 Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Ever think that God doesn't hear your prayers? Ask yourself, Am I remaining in Him? Are His words remaining in me? Am I reading His Word, meditating on it, hearing it preached? If all we listen to is secular radio, TV and podcasts, etc, His words are **not** going to remain in us. But if and when they do, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you! I ask for a Maserati or a huge farm! Such wishes reveal that we weren't really abiding in Him and His Word after all, for His Word will shape our wishes. Delight thyself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. When we delight in Him, we'll desire what He desires and then He is pleased to give us those desires. And as His Words abide in us, His joy will abide in us and our joy will be full. How many of you want full joy? Abide in Him, let His Word abide in you.

Let's close by looking at our theme verse for the year. Vs 16 "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." Jesus chose and appointed you to go and bear lasting fruit for Him. To appointed means He assigned you a task. Presidents appoint people to their cabinets. Employers appoint workers for certain jobs. Jesus appointed you to bear lasting fruit for Him. Either we will or we won't. And if we fail, we've failed at the whole reason He chose us and appointed us.

He chose us, and He grafted us into His family vine that we might produce much good fruit for His Father, the Gardener. But if we're still using foul language, running after worldly pleasures, using our time and money for only personal desires, we're using His blessings and resources, His sap and nutrients for personal fruit that doesn't last, and we'd better get ready for His pruning shears and burn pile. Look back over how you spent your money this past week, this past year. How you spent your time, your life. Did you use these for things that glorify God and could be called good fruit for His kingdom? More importantly, how will you use your time, money, and life this coming week? This coming year? The rest of this day? During the rest of January, we will be looking at how to produce fruit in our daily lives in our homes, in our jobs, at school, etc. But today, let's ask for His help now to produce much good fruit for Him.