

I AM: Jesus is the Vine – Lesson Summary

As summer ends and fall begins there is both beauty and decay. The reality of creation's preparation for fall is that things die off. We see leaves fall, grass stops growing, and temperatures drop. It can be a reminder of both God's care and sin's curse. However, in just a few short months we will experience the beauty of spring. As creation burst forth to new life, we are reminder again of God's care and His redemptive power. Jesus' final I Am statement is a clear representation of these realities. Death is brought by sin, but life is established in Christ.

Jesus' declaration that He is the Vine concludes His seven I Am statements in the Gospel of John. This statement is often less familiar to many. We are likely familiar with His pronouncements that He is the Light of the World, Bread of Life, or Good Shepherd. Likewise, the connections to these in the OT are often easier to see. However, to those Jesus was speaking to, the gravity of His statement would have brought them back to two passages in the OT that addressed the Vinedresser and the vineyards in which He was intimately involved.

In the book of Isaiah there are two "Vineyard Songs" which describe God's relationship with His people. The vine in these songs represent God's people, Israel. These songs are a reminder of God's care for His people and their response. Both songs address the Vinedresser, the Lord, and Israel's response to Him. The Lord's character will remain consistent in both, but Israel's response will not.

Isaiah 5:1-7 describes a vinedresser who owns a precious vineyard that He cares for. The Vinedresser prepared the soil by removing its stones, planted the choicest vines, and built a watchtower to watch over it. He gave it a purpose and every opportunity to fulfill that purpose. It was there to produce good grapes. However, the vineyard failed to produce good grapes, and instead, provided only wild grapes. Because of this, the Vinedresser removed its protection, trampled on it, and no longer cared for it allowing it to become a wasteland. Isaiah concludes this song with a declaration that the Lord is the Vinedresser and Israel the vineyard. Israel's failure to accomplish God's purposes for them resulted in the scattering of His people, their desolation, and His departure from them.

Isaiah 27:2-6 begins in the same way as the vineyard song presented in *Isaiah 5:1-7*. The Vinedresser takes pleasure in planting a vineyard that He intimately cares for. He taunts the enemy to come so He could fight him off. The stark contrast between the songs' conclusion is shocking. In this song the vineyard takes root, blossoms, and fills the entire world with fruit. What happened? How is it that one vineyard produces an abundance of fruit while the other yields nothing of value. I believe this is what makes Jesus' statement that He is the Vine in *John 15:1-6* so powerful. It's His resurrection power that brings forth fruit. There is an intimate connection through Christ that does the redemptive work of bringing forth good fruit. Jesus promises that those who abide in Him will bear much fruit.

Like the vineyard songs describe, there are two responses to the Vinedresser's care. The vineyard will produce either good fruit or bad fruit. Those that produce bad fruit are the ones who don't remain connected to the Vine that is Jesus Christ. Those who produce the good fruit are the ones who abide in Christ. Jesus isn't only the better vine, the perfect Israel, but He's the very Vine that provides the power to produce good fruit. The gravity of Jesus's declaration that He is the Vine would have been understood by His audience. Jesus would have connected Himself to the True Vinedresser, the Lord. The Vinedresser planted the choicest vine. The Lord sent the Vine, Christ, to do what Israel could not. It is only through the redemptive power of Christ that our lives begin to bear fruit as we are pruned by His Spirit's work in our lives.

Discussion:

- 1) Which I AM statement has been the most encouraging to you?
- 2) What "fruit" has your life been producing lately? Has it been wild grapes, or true Gospel fruit?
- 3) Jesus declares that those who abide in Him will bear much fruit. What does abiding in Christ mean to you?