

John 15: Jesus' “Viability” Theology

The Paradigm of Viability: The True Vine

John 15.1-4

"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, as I also 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.

“I Am the True Vine”

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”

- ❖ In his Gospel, the Apostle John presents Jesus as the “Son of God” primarily through his (Jesus’) words. Of all the miracles done by Jesus, John curates just seven as “miraculous signs”—intended to validate Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and lead his readers to belief and eternal life “in his name” (John 20.31). In addition to these seven validating signs, John records seven “I AM” statements made by Jesus which attest to his divine nature as the Son of God and his fulfillment of the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah.
- ❖ This final evening of Jesus with his disciples, as John presents it, is almost entirely in the words of Jesus. He is giving them teaching and understanding that he has not presented to the masses, including this statement: *“I AM the true vine.”*

❖ Previously in his ministry, Jesus has declared—

(1) “I AM the Bread of Life” (6.35)

(2) “I AM the Light of the World” (8.12)

(3) “I AM the Gate for the sheep” (10.7)

(4) “I AM the Good Shepherd” (10.11)

(5) “I AM the Resurrection and the Life” (11.25)

❖ Earlier this evening, in response to the confusion of his disciples, Jesus had made another “I AM” statement—

(6) “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (14.6)

❖ Jesus now speaks his final “I AM” statement; in many ways, it is the ultimate expression of who he is, particularly in relationship to us.

(7) “I AM the True Vine” (15.1)

“I AM who I AM”

God said to Moses, “I AM who I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ “ God also said to Moses . . . This is My name forever, the name you shall call Me from generation to generation.”

- ❖ When God revealed himself to Moses following four hundred years of of internment and slavery in Egypt, He identified himself with these words: “I AM who I AM.” With this identification, He was declaring himself to be the *Self-Existent One*. To the Jews, this was the most exclusive and sacred name of God, YHWH (Yahweh).
- ❖ The Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek in Alexandria, Egypt, by 70 (or 72) Jewish scholars during the third century B.C. When they translated the name “I AM” it was “*Ego eimi*”.
- ❖ Using prophetic “I AM’s”, Isaiah presented the day when Israel would see the salvation of YHWH, and now in his “I AM” statements, Jesus has laid claim to this identity for himself.

“I Am the True Vine”

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

ISAIAH 5.1-2

- ❖ The imagery of a vine (or a vineyard) and the gardener was familiar to the Jews, used as a picture of Israel whom God had sovereignly chosen and planted in His vineyard, caring for it with the expectation of a good harvest—“but it yielded only bad fruit.”
- ❖ Everything in the Old Testament was a foreshadowing—a shadow or a type pointing toward a fulfilling reality: namely, Jesus.

- ❖ Jesus had shared numerous vineyard parables that presented the kingdom of God as God's vineyard—it was no longer ethnic Israel. Now Jesus declared to his disciples, “*I AM the **true** vine.*” By identifying himself as God's true vine, he was declaring that only those who remain (abide) in him can participate in the kingdom of God.
- ❖ This identification as the Father's “true vine” and the singular source of life captures some of the most significant truths present in John's Prologue—
 - ▶ *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*
 - ▶ *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*
 - ▶ *. . . the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - ▶ *No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*
- ❖ Jesus is the True Vine, the Father's *Only* for us, in whom we must learn to truly abide.