

Stay Connected”

John 15:1, 4-5

1: I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

4: Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5: I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Jesus begins His discourse here in John 15 by using what is known as “oriental hyperbole.” In other words, He is speaking in the vernacular of the people, while at the same time making an exaggerated statement in order to evoke an emotional response. Of course, Jesus knew that it was impossible for a person to be a vine, but He also knew that in making this reference, His listeners would know exactly what He was talking about, and respond accordingly. Many theologians have speculated as to what provoked Jesus to reference vines and vine-dressing, and they have come to a variety of conclusions. It could have been that He was referring to the great ornamental vine that decorated the walls of the upper room where they were seated, or maybe He was talking about the vineyards through which they passed on their way there. He may have been making reference to what Jeremiah said in Chapter 2, verse 21 of his book, “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” Whatever the reason for His choice of words, in His efforts to make it perfectly clear to His followers of their need to be totally and completely dependent upon Him, Jesus, in referring to Himself as “the true vine,” makes use of a most excellent metaphor.

But you see, that’s what I like about Jesus. He knew how to

talk to people. Unlike some of us, He loved people enough to tolerate, even assimilate some of their idiosyncrasies, without losing sight of who He was. So to the fishermen, he talked about fishing. And to the farmer, He talked about farming. And I'm convinced that if He were to encounter one of our young men standing on the street corner with his 'doo' rag on his head, his saggy pants, and Timberland boots on, He would probably walk up to Him, and ask him, "Waddup dawg?" And that's because Jesus loves people, and we've got to take a lesson from that and not be so deep all the time that we can't even reach folk. But that's another sermon...

And so Jesus says, "I am the true vine. And my Father is the husbandman." This is the last and the seventh of the great "I am" statements spoken by Jesus in the book of John. And when He makes these "I am" statements, He brings to mind how God spoke to Moses back in Exodus 3, and told him to tell Pharoah that it was I AM THAT I AM that sent him. In other words, God says, I am whatever you need me to be...whenever you need me to be it. In making these "I am" statements, Jesus is letting us know that He and He alone is the source of our supply. And so therefore...

- To those who are hungry, in John 6:35 Jesus says, "I am the bread of life."**
- To the one who walks in darkness, in John 8:12 He says, "I am the light of the world."**
- To the one who feels locked out of society, in John 10:9 He says, "I am the gate..."**
- For those sheep who are in need of comfort and in need of guidance, and in need of feeding, in John 10:11, He is the Good Shepherd.**
- To those who fear the pains of death, in John 11:25, He says, "I am the resurrection and the life..."**
- To the one who searches for truth, in John 14:6 He is "the**

way, the truth, and the life.”

And finally, here in John 15:1, he says to those in need of a divine connection, “I am the true vine.” And right away this compels us to look at the significance of Jesus’ choice of words. Notice here that He does not simply say, “I am the vine,” but that I am the true vine, therefore the implication being that if He is the true vine, then there has got to be some false vines out there somewhere. Well then, if we’re going to be able to tell the difference between the true and the false, we’ve got to ask ourselves, “what exactly is a vine? What does a vine do? Webster says that a vine is “any plant with a long, thin stem that grows along the ground or climbs a wall or other support by means of tendrils, etc.” The vine then, grows out of the ground, and as it does so, it provides nourishment for the branches. It gives sustenance to the branches. It transmits life to the branches. So then, what do you think would happen if we were to cut off one of those branches? That branch would survive for a short while. It would still continue to look as if it had life for a little while, but then it would eventually wither away and die. And that’s what’s happening to a lot of us. We think that we can make it on our own. So we only call on God when we really, really get in trouble. Some of us only pick up our bibles when we come to church on Sunday. The rest of the week, we live trying to figure out things on our own. But I hear Jesus saying that “the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine. Somebody look at somebody, and say, “Stay connected.”

And not only must we stay connected, but we’ve got to stay connected to the true vine. Because as I said before, there are a lot of false vines out there. They look good. They sound, on the surface, like they might give you a pretty good deal. But you must understand that what makes the false vine false is that it can only give you a semblance of life. They can only give you a

similitude of life. They can only give you a caricature of life. Oh, the false vine might give you money, but it cannot give you life. It might give you fame, but it cannot give you life. It might give you temporary satisfaction, but sooner or later, you're going to have to come back to the true vine, which is Jesus. I'm reminded of the case of a famous singer (y'all know who I'm talking about) who grew up singing in the church, got rich and famous, and eventually ended up in an abusive marriage, and addicted to crack cocaine. And I'm reminded of another singer...whose music I used to love ('Bad Luck' was one of my favorite songs, y'all). I don't know if you knew this, but this young man was ordained to preach the Gospel at the age of ten. Well, he also got rich and famous, he ended up paralyzed from the waist down, and just recently died at the ripe young age of fifty-nine. Well, brother preacher, what happened to them? They didn't abide...in the vine. They got deceived...by a false vine. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with getting rich. There's nothing wrong with being famous. But I heard the Bible say, 'what profit it a man...to gain the whole world, and lose his soul.' Somebody look at somebody and say, "Stay connected."

Stay connected to Jesus. No matter where you go in 2010, you've got to stay, as the old folks used to say, "wrapped up, tied up, tangled up in Jesus." Don't let the lure of false riches or instant fame lure you away from Jesus. Don't let trials or tribulations take you out of the will of God. If God is going to bless us in 2010, the word for this year is that we've got to stay connected...to the vine. Jesus says here that the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. He's talking here about spiritual fruit. According to Galatians 5:22, that's love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, or self-control. It does not matter how you try, you can't get those things...on your own. That's because they are the fruit of the Spirit of God. Have you ever seen an apple

tree straining to grow apples? No, they don't do that, they just be what they are. And the only way that you can be an authentic child of God, is that you've got to stay connected to God. You can't just pick Him up when you want Him, and put Him down when you don't. Therefore, it does not matter how many self-help books you read, or how much Dr. Phil you watch. It does not matter how much Oprah you watch. None of that stuff is going to do you any good. For "blessed is the man...who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly..." You can't just get advice from everywhere and expect to stay connected. You can't go to the world's system and think that it's going to give you the right guidance for your spiritual well-being. That's why the bible says in Proverbs 3:6 that if we acknowledge God in all our ways, He shall direct our path.

Stay connected. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." And again, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." In the book of Ephesians, the first chapter, verse 3, the Bible speaks of "our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." As a matter of fact, the theme of the book of Ephesians is "in Christ." Because that's where you're going to find your blessing: "in Christ." That's where you'll find your source, your sustenance, your life, in Christ. Jesus said that the time would come when the very elect would be deceived. That time, brothers and sisters, is now. Folks are being lured away from the truth of the Gospel at an alarming rate. A whole lot of people are going around thinking that they're saved, but they're really not. But Jesus said "abide in me." To abide means to live in. It means to stay in. it means to remain in. It means to hide in. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." And, "in the shadow of thy wings, I

will rejoice.” I don’t know about you, but when I come out from under the shadow of His wings, I become a sad man. I become a bad man. I become a crazy man. I recall a time when people used to ask me, “why are you always reading that Bible?” I used to tell them, that you don’t want to know me if I close this book. You can’t abide in Christ with your Bible closed. You can’t stay connected...only coming to church when you want to come. But you’ve got to have something on the inside...that drives you into the presence of God! I want Him! I need Him! I’ve gotta have Him! And I’ll give up anything...get rid of anybody...that stands between me and Him! Somebody look at somebody...and say “stay connected.”

And I’m going home...in the book of Matthew chapter 18, verse 3, Jesus says this, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” In other words, in order to abide in Christ, we’ve got to put our complete and total trust in Him. We’ve got to become totally dependent on Him. In other words, I can’t walk without Him. I can’t talk without Him. You see, the problem is that some of us still think that we can do a whole lot of things without God. But I submit to you today that I am completely helpless without Him. What about you? Can you truly say on tonight that you really do understand that you cannot make it without Him? Do you really understand that without Him, you can do nothing? I mean nothing. Do you really understand that if it had not been for the Lord on your side...you be a wretch...and undone? Have you been on the verge of death enough times to realize that it was the Lord...who helped me...it was the Lord...who saved me....it was the Lord...who delivered me...haven’t you been...in enough car accidents? Haven’t you been...in the operating room...haven’t you been...in enough trouble...to realize....that He is...the source of your strength...he is...the strength of your life...He is...a very present help...in the time

of trouble...Say yeah! Say yeah!

Many of us...are looking for a breakthrough...in 2010...in our finances...we're looking for a breakthrough...in our relationships. We're looking for a breakthrough in...our ministries. But I don't know about you, but I'm looking for a breakthrough in my attitude, I'm looking for a breakthrough in my personality. I'm looking for a breakthrough...in my character...and I believe...that the same day...that I get that breakthrough...the relationships will be healed...the the ministry's gonna blow up...and the money's gonna show up!

This year...I'm gonna do...like the prodigal son did. When he first left home, he looked at his father...and he said 'give me.' But when he came back...from all that he had been through...he said 'make me.' And that's what I'm saying to God...in 2010. I'm going from give me...to make me! Make me...more like you...make me...somebody that you can trust...make me...what You want me to be..

I don't know about you...but I've got to stay connected...I don't know about you...but I've got to stay hooked up to Jesus...wrapped up...tied up...tangled up...I've gotta wake up...with my mind on him...go to bed...with Him on my mind...

Stay connected...