

**“THE RIGHT CONNECTION”**

John 15:1-8

Having the right connections is important in life. And this is true at many levels. For example, how many of us own a cell phone? How many of us have lost a voice connection while using a cell phone? ““Can you hear me? Can you hear me now? How about now?”” Imagine losing a cell phone connection when dialing 9-1-1; or when stranded on a lonely highway during a fierce winter storm.

Or what would happen to your electrical appliances—refrigerator, oven, microwave, TV, washer, dryer—without the right connections? This is why most troubleshooting manuals for appliances and computers begin with basic questions like: “Is your device plugged into an electrical outlet?” And after that, “Have you checked all other connections?”

The right connections are also important in relationships. “Oh, I do like that person. We’ve dated for several weeks. But, well, I just don’t feel a connection.” And along with relationships, how important are the right connections to travel arrangements, job interviews, linking perpetrators to crimes—the so-called chain of evidence—even human anatomy?” How does the old song go? “Toe bone connected to the foot bone. Foot bone connected to the heel bone. Heel bone connected to the ankle bone.” And so on, bone after bone, connection after connection.

Clearly, having the right connections is important in life. And today’s text is about having the right connection; in fact, the most important connection of all: a connection to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. And as I read the text, John 15:1-8, listen carefully for all the words and phrases which describe a connection.

**Jesus said: “I am the vine, and My Father is the gardener. 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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.”**

So, which words or phrases in the text describe a connection? Virtually all of them. For example, Jesus used the word REMAIN eight times. Remain is a word of connectivity. Remain. Stay. Never leave. Jesus also used the preposition IN ten times. IN describes a close connection and even location. And so Jesus spoke of “in Me” and “in you” and “in the vine” and “in him”.

Or consider the phrases: **“He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit,”** verse 2; and, **“no branch can bear fruit by itself,”** verse 4; and, **“I am the vine; you are the branches,”** verse 5; and, **“apart from Me you can do nothing,”** verse 5; and finally, **“showing yourselves to be My disciples,”** verse 8. Each of these phrases describes a connection to Jesus Christ or the lack of a connection to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was a masterful teacher. His words were powerful, meaningful, and relevant to daily lives and daily problems—and to such an extent that we read of His *Sermon on the Mount*: **“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law,”** Matthew 7:28-29. Religious leaders who spoke often but said little.

Many of the illustrations that Jesus used in His teaching were taken from ordinary life: familiar scenes, current events, common occupations, examples from nature. He used the example of lilies of the field and birds of the air to teach the foolishness of worry and anxiety. He used the example of a persistent widow to teach the importance of persisting in prayer. He used the example of a farmer sowing seeds to teach the different ways in which people receive the word of God. In all these examples Jesus used the natural to explain the spiritual. And He did the same with today’s text.

Using the simple, everyday analogy of a vine and its branches, Jesus taught the absolute importance of being connected to Him by faith. A vineyard, of course, was a familiar sight in Israel. However, we don’t need a vineyard to learn the lessons of the vine and branches. The same lessons are seen all around us; in every tree, every plant, every shrub, and even every weed. What then are the lessons of the vine and branches?

**First, having the right connection means being connected to the right vine.** Have you ever been fooled by an artificial plant; a plant so skillfully made that you thought it was real; that you were tempted to water it? Perhaps you did water it. Perhaps you continued to think the plant was real until you closely inspected it; until you touched it and felt plastic instead of plant and fabric instead of foliage; until you saw

the MADE IN CHINA tag dangling on a stem or leaf. “I thought that plant was alive,” you said.

Only, it wasn’t alive. The plant was fake, a counterfeit. It merely had the illusion of life. And friends, no amount of sunlight, soil, water, fertilizer, and even kind and coaxing words spoken to an artificial plant will ever make it grow taller, wider, fuller, greener; or enable it to produce a single living seed or single living bloom. So, then, if you were a branch—and according to Jesus Christ, figuratively speaking, we are all branches: **“I am the vine,”** He said, **“you are the branches”**—to which type of vine would you rather be connected? A real, living vine, or a plastic, artificial vine?

Notice what Jesus said first in today’s text: **“I am the true vine,”** John 15:1. The Greek word order is even more emphatic; literally, “I am the vine, the true one.” Emphasis on true. The true vine, the real vine, the genuine vine, as opposed to all the other vines which are fake, counterfeit, untrue, and unreal. **“In Him was life,”** John wrote of Jesus in the first verses of his Gospel Record. **“And that life was the light of men.”**

How many Bible passages can you think of that describe Jesus Christ as the only Savior; as the only way to be saved; and as the only source of true life in the here-and-now and eternal life in the hereafter? Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

Simon Peter said of Jesus in Acts 4:12, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** Or the familiar words of John 3:16, **“God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13-14, **“He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”**

What these and many other Bible passages teach verbally, Jesus taught visually, simply, graphically, and unmistakable with His illustration of the vine and its branches; namely, that He Himself is the only true, genuine, and real Savior; and that apart from Him no one can be saved. **“Apart from Me you can do nothing,”** He said in John 15:5. And even more graphically in verse 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.”**

Regrettably, there are as many religious counterfeits and false Christs as there are plastic, artificial plants. History is littered with them: Buddha, Krishna, Jim Jones, Muhammad, Mormonism, Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Modern Science,

Advanced Technology, Fame, Fortune, Power. “Believe in us,” they all say. “Connect yourself to us, and thou shalt be saved.’ But that is blatantly, tragically untrue. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no life; there is no salvation; there is no true wealth or true fulfillment or true happiness. There is only dead wood destined for fire.

Conversely, dear friends, the one who is connected to Christ by faith, as you are, *has* life, *has* salvation, *has* forgiveness, *has* eternal life, *has* the means to overcome problems and to forgive injuries and to endure hardships and to enrich marriages. Why? Because the power and motivation to do these things comes directly from the vine and not for the branches. His power, not ours. His means and motivation, not ours. Clearly, having the right connection means being connected to the right vine, Jesus Christ.

**Second, the right connection means staying connected to the right vine.** Always trusting in Jesus. Always relying on His word. But surely, every Christian knows this, right? Every Christian knows what every gardener knows; namely, that the very existence of a branch—its life and its ability to bear fruit—is due solely to its *lasting connection* to its vine. After all, which came first, the vine or the branches? Did the vine grow the branches or did the branches grow the vine? In John 15:16, only a few verses after today’s text, Jesus said: **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”**

And therefore every Christian who understands the first lesson of this text; specifically, that all true blessings come from Jesus Christ, as Paul explained in Ephesians 1:3, saying, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ”**—if you and I understand this first lesson, shouldn’t we see the importance of the second lesson? Should we really need to be told to remain in Christ? Yet, how many times did Jesus use the word REMAIN in today’s text? Eight times. And to whom was He talking? To the branches. To His disciples. To you and to me.

Friends, the temptation to believe that we no longer need Jesus; or that as branches we no longer need the support and strength of the vine; or that we no longer need to stay close to God’s word; comes in many forms. “I’m confirmed now, and know everything there is to know in the Bible. I don’t need church any longer. I don’t need Christian fellowship. I can always turn on the TV. And if the pastor is too talkative or says things I don’t agree with, I can always turn it off too.” Or, “Jesus Christ was part of our wedding ceremony. But we really didn’t expect Him to move into our house.” Or, “I’m young, healthy, and focused on my career. I’ll have plenty of time later to focus on Jesus, salvation, and all that religious stuff .” Or, “I can solve this problem, this depression, this temptation, this marital difficulty on my own. I’m completely self-sufficient.”

Are any of these assessments really true? Have we no ongoing need for God's word, church, and the warmth and support of fellow Christians? Is Christ only important to a wedding ceremony but not to wedded life? Will there always be a tomorrow for all that religious stuff? Can I solve all my problems on my own? What did Jesus have to say on this matter. He said, **"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me,"** John 15:4. And again in John 15:5, **"Apart from Me you can do nothing."** That seems clear enough, doesn't it? And if it doesn't seem clear enough, remove a flower from a stem and watch what happens to the flower.

And if this reality is sobering, let its opposite fill you with peace and joy. If Jesus said, **"Apart from Me you can do nothing,"** how would He finish the following sentence? "With Me you can do..." Everything. With Me you can do everything. With Me you can bear everything. With Me you can overcome everything." And this is why Paul—the Paul who suffered so much and accomplished so much—wrote in Philippians 4:10, **"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."**

This is where we find the strength to deal with the loss of a loved one. This is where we find the strength to spend days and nights caring for a sick parent, spouse, or child. This is where we find the strength to face financial difficulties and troubled marriages and the end of life itself. For when we are connected to Jesus by faith, the strength is His, not ours. And do you, dear branches, believe that there is one thing that His strength cannot accomplish? Having the right connection means staying connected to the right vine, Jesus Christ.

**Finally, the right connection is a cared-for connection**—or in the words of our text, a CLEAN connection. **"I am the vine,"** said Jesus, **"and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you,"** John 15:1-3. In these verses the Greek word for prunes and cleans is one and the same: CATHARIZO, from which we derive our English word CATHARSIS. Pruning, therefore, is a form of catharsis, of cleaning the plant.

According to one article I read titled *Pruning With A Purpose*: "Pruning is perhaps the least understood and most abused of all gardening chores. Many people prune their plants for the same reason some men climb mountains—because they're there. They head outdoors with loppers and a saw in hand with little knowledge of the plant's ideal form, the best time to prune, the proper way to make a pruning cut, or when to stop. Incorrect pruning results in poor growth, unnatural plant forms, and poor flower and fruit ;production."

Conversely, proper pruning is essential to the health, shape, beauty, and productivity of a plant. This is a fact of nature. It is also a fact of faith. I don't know if pruning hurts a plant. I do know that pruning or cleaning out the dead wood of our lives can hurt. But oh, how necessary a task if we are to remain connected to Christ the Vine and produce abundant fruit in our lives—fruit, godly speech and godly behavior which, according to the text, glorifies God the Father and identifies us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Whether God the Gardener prunes our lives through the guidance of Scripture or through difficult circumstances—cleans out harmful thoughts, wrong directions, sources of temptation or false pride, an unhealthy reliance on self or material possessions; we should thank and praise Him for His ongoing love and care. For through such perfect pruning, He keeps us connected to Christ the Vine and makes our faith more and more productive. As the author of Hebrews wrote: **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it,”** Hebrews 12:11.

Having the right connection means having a lasting connection and a constantly cared-for connection with the right vine. And the right vine is Jesus Christ. **“I am the vine,”** He said. **“The true one.”**