



"I AM THE VINE"

Question: what is it that gets you out of bed in the morning?

Is it the kids? The parents? The alarm? The clock-radio? The birds? The carers? The breakfast? The toilet? The school? The job? Or something else?

Of course, it's possible to interpret the question that way, but you can also read it on a deeper level. What is the driver in your life? What is your motivation, your meaning, your purpose? Why are you here? And what are you doing with the life that you've been given?

God has granted each of us the opportunity to be used by Him; to make a difference to a world that needs it. But in order for that to happen, there are certain things we need to grasp. Which brings us to Jesus' final 'I Am' claim:

John 15:1-17

Jesus and His disciples are making their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is going to be arrested. And Jesus knows what's coming – but still, He goes. And enroute He says what He says here:

Anokhi hu ha'gephen ("I am the vine") ...

V'atem ha'sharigim ("And you are the branches").

Now this picture of a vine would have been a familiar one to Jesus' disciples. In Isaiah 5:1-7 and Psalm 80:8-18, Israel is compared to a vine and God to a

vineyard owner. That's why, on the doors of the Jerusalem temple, there were carvings of a vine, with spreading branches and clusters of grapes. And every good Jewish boy or girl saw themselves as branches on that vine.

But Jesus says "I am the vine, you are the branches." I.e. "I am the fulfilment of all that Israel was made to be, and if you're going to do anything, you need to belong to Me."

What does this tell us about realising our purpose and potential?

1) He's Talking Faithfulness. By which I don't mean our faithfulness to God, first-and-foremost, but His faithfulness to us – because Jesus loved us long before we loved Him. As Jesus says here, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." And that's all of us. Think about it like this:

- **When was Jesus born?** 4 BC (approximately. Dionysius Exiguus is to blame for that little discrepancy).
- **When did Jesus die?** 30 AD (again, approximately. The Gospel writers weren't fussy about exact timeframes).
- **When were *you* born?** A range of answers, but we're talking within the past 100 years, right? Of course.

What's the point? That Jesus came and lived and died long before you turned up, and He did it for *you* as much as anyone else. So who loved who first? *Exactly!*

So we begin with Jesus' faithfulness to us – but we don't end there. Because Jesus also says, "Remain in Me, and I will remain in you." I.e. we've got to be faithful to Him, too – or want to at least! Because if we want to be all that we can be, we need God's power, His energy, flowing through our veins. And that means we need to be in relationship with the One who put us here. We need to love Him back.

So, what we achieve in life is not so much about what we do or even who we are, but *whose* we are, who we belong to. And who do we belong to? Jesus of Nazareth.

2) He's Talking Fruitfulness. What are we here for? Or to put it another way: what is the purpose of a vine? To produce grapes, right? And what is the purpose of a branch on that vine? Exactly the same thing. Jesus' purpose, His mission, is our purpose, our mission.

- **Jesus came to tell people, "God loves you."** He sends us to do the same.
- **Jesus came to shine light into darkness.** He sends us to do the same.
- **Jesus came on a mission to save the world.** He sends us to do the same.

Now as with any plant, the branches of a vine have to be pruned if they're going to produce fruit. And there can be times in our lives when God has to teach us some hard lessons, not because He wants to, but because He has

to, and He wants what's best for us, e.g. when we go our own way and it backfires, or our conscience tell us, "That was a mistake. You need to put that right." When that happens, we need to understand that God is pruning us, so that we can be the people He designed us to be.

The main point, however, is this: we all belong to Jesus (potentially), we're all His branches, and we all have fruit to bear. We're all a part of something far bigger than us, than the pay-rise or the promotion, than the exams or the assignments, than getting the kids ready for school or playgroup.

We're here to make a difference. Just as Jesus did.

Getting It Right

Now look again at these words: vine; branches; fruit.

Or, to phrase it another way: acceptance; identity; achievement.

In our task-orientated world, it can be easy to get it the wrong way round – even as Christians. Which means the sequence can often look like this:

Achievement >>> Identity >>> Acceptance

Problem is: if we start with achievement and find our sense of self-worth in that, believing that the more we do the more accepted we will be ... we'll be setting ourselves up for a fall. Instead, the sequence needs to look like this:

Acceptance >>> Identity >>> Achievement

I.e. we need to realise that we are already accepted, by Jesus, and find our sense of self-worth in that. Any achievements we make in this life are a result of that acceptance, not a reason for it. To use Jesus' analogy, we need to recognise that we belong to the vine. Then we'll realise that we are His branches in this world, and His Spirit will begin to generate fruit, through us.

Now I need to point out that there is an alternative to all this - because Jesus always gives us a choice: to be a part of the vine, or to exist for ourselves; to be living branches, or lifeless ones; to bear fruit that lasts, or no fruit at all; to spend eternity with Jesus, or eternity without Him.

But what kind of crazy choice is *that*?

Jesus is saying, to us all, "I love you, and you're here because I put you here. You're a part of Me, and I'm a part of you. If you stick with Me, I'll stick with you. And together, we can change the world."

Now isn't that a reason for getting up in the morning?