

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

### Ch. 15

Jesus has taken His disciples from the Upper Room, scene of the "last supper," up to Gethsemane, just hours before His arrest where He's fingered by the traitor, Judas.

There He preps them for "the hinge of history" -- His crucifixion and resurrection. He says after His ascension to heaven, He'll return to earth as King of kings, in great power. No one, not even He, knows *when* He'll return; only God the Father knows. Until then His followers are to remain faithful to Him (Matthew 24:29-44). **Let's read John 15:1-16:4.**

### Branching Out

Skirting old Jerusalem, they pass vineyards which Jesus uses as an allegory to describe the relationship He wants to have with us. 1,000 years before Christ, David, Israel's second king, used the vine metaphor in this prayer to God on behalf of his people:

*"Come back, come back, O God, and restore us! Let your beaming face shine upon us with the sunrise rays of glory, and then nothing will be able to stop us! Remember how you transplanted us here like a tender vine from Egypt. You cleared the land for your vineyard, evicting the nations from your land and planting us here. The roots of your vineyard went deep into the soil and filled the land with fruit. Because of your favor on your vineyard, blessing extended to every mountain of influence. Through this flourishing vineyard mighty ones were raised up.*

*"The nations were blessed by your fruitful vineyard of Israel all the way from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. So, Lord, why have you broken down your fence of favor around us? Trespassers can steal the fruit from off our vines, and now every wild beast comes breaking through our wall to ravage us. You've left us without protection!"* (Psalms 80:7-13)

About 750 B.C. Isaiah witnessed one of Jerusalem's most turbulent periods, condemning the rulers for crushing the downtrodden.

Isaiah saw the **vineyard** as the Jews. The **vines** were their leaders with whom He'd dealt generously by leading them out of slavery in Egypt into "the promised land." The fruit God expected was justice and honesty. But the harvest came in "wild," not "sweet," due to the Jews' sins, resulting in their being taken to Babylon as captives. (Isaiah 5:1-10)

Jesus says, "Israel blew it; now *I'm* the *real* Vine; my Father is the Winegrower; you're the branches. When you and I are in an intimate, organic relationship, the harvest will be sweet!"

Anyone *not* in this relationship is deadwood to be burned. Good harvests occur when the Winegrower (God) lops off "sucker shoots" that produce leaves but no fruit. One fruitless, dead branch had already been removed -- Judas Iscariot.

What *is* this fruit? **Let's read Galatians 5:19-23.**

Did Judas "abide in the Vine" and produce good fruit? Is everyone who associates with Jesus a true believer? After Judas' "sell-out," Jesus says, "Those who truly follow Me will stay close to Me and show evidence of that in their lives, unlike Judas."

### **DISCUSS:**

Jesus invites us to "Make yourself at home in My love. Be fulfilled, joyful and fruitful, because My joy is saturating your life." He is *not* saying to His followers, "Screw up, and I'll cut you off, and you'll burn forever." No, like a caring gardener, He's committed to putting us where we'll succeed at being His authentic reps.

To succeed, we must "abide" in Him, talk to Him, listen to Him, allow the Bible to "prune" us, show us what sin is, inspire us to right living. Then good fruit's inevitable! What signs show that we're a true, fruit-bearing branch?

- (1) We'll have "prayer power" when our prayers are what Jesus wants to hear.
- (2) We'll be known as Christ-followers. But some contend, "Hey, I'm quiet about my faith because it's private." Jesus says our faith is *personal*, but it's for sure not to be *private*. (Matthew 5:14-16)
- (3) Our lives will be marked by love, like God's love for us --- unconditional, undemanding, a love that loves even the unlovable. When we love like that, people see God in us.
- (4) We'll have joy (John 10:10). Christ found joy (Hebrews 12:2) in coming to earth to restore us sinners to a loving relationship with God. Telling people God loves them unconditionally, holds nothing against them and wants to live with them forever – now that's *real* joy! We branches are to let fruit, which God will produce, decorate our lives so that others will see, enjoy and sample it.

### **DISCUSS:**

## **What The World Needs Now**

"Love others the way I love you," Jesus *commands!* Why such strong language? Because this is the best way to love, the *only* way to love someone impossible to love. Met any of those?!!

Who are you struggling to get along with now? By reflecting on how much God loves *us*, on Christ's sacrifice for us, we can begin to let *Him* love even the jerks *through* us!

As God's *friends*, He takes us into His confidence, tells us His plans, how we tick, where the world's headed. Just as He hand-picked His disciples, Jesus is saying God's *chosen*, or *strategically placed* us to help bring His love and wholeness to our world. So "Get busy loving!" (I John 4:19)

## THE RELIGION OF HATRED

Facing the cross that next day, knowing His guys would be tortured and martyred, Jesus braces them for rough times: "When people hate you, they're really hating Me." (Matthew 10:22)

Brother Andrew's missionary organization, Open Doors, reports that in 2020 more than 260 million Christians live where they are the targets of extreme persecution ([opendoorsusa.org/wwl](http://opendoorsusa.org/wwl)). In China Christ's followers live in a "surveillance state." That nation's 93 million believers are stalked by 415 million cameras.

Here, in order, are the top 10 countries where it is most dangerous to follow Jesus: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Yemen, Iran and India.

Jesus says, "I've told you all this to get you ready." What causes this hate? It's *godlessness*. Jesus is speaking of that day's *religious* leaders when He says, "Oh, they know religion. But they don't know the *true and living* God; they only know the god they *want* to know.

## What Vine Are You Clinging To?

Chances are you won't have to face persecution like the young men who went to Ecuador to take the Gospel to cannibals in the Auca Indian tribe. These missionaries were slain in 1956 by those they came to love. One of them, Jim Elliott, journaled just before his death, "He's no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

If we're a follower of Christ, we should stay plugged in to Him for *real* joy, love and purpose for living. If we're not His follower, we'll be cast into the fire, a literal place the Bible calls hell.

Like it or not, our *only* hope is God. Paul writes, "No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; His laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners. But now God's shown us a different way to heaven -- not by 'being good enough' and trying to keep His laws, but by a new way. Now God says He will accept and acquit us -- declare us 'not guilty' -- if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we *all* can be saved by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we've been like. Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us 'not guilty' of offending Him if we trust in Jesus who in His kindness freely takes away our sins." (Romans 3:20-24).

#### **DISCUSS:**

If you've never accepted God's total forgiveness that Jesus has already bought for you, you can do it right now. Just swing open the door of your heart and pray something like this:

"God, I believe You sent Your Son Jesus from heaven to pay for my sins. I don't deserve this love. I can never be good enough to earn it. Nobody can speak enough words over me or splash me with enough oil or water to set me right with You. Thank You for loving and forgiving me. Please enter my life and make me Yours from the inside out. Open a 'branch' office in me. And let's get into the fruit business together! I ask all this in the name of Jesus, amen."

His Deal

[www.HisDeal.org](http://www.HisDeal.org)

george@HisDeal.org

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