

I AM: The Vineⁱ John 15:1-17

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is so good to see you today. My name is Chris Wigley, I'm one of the pastors here at Trinity. If you are a first-time guest, we are just thrilled to have you with us today. We'd love the opportunity to get to know you a little bit. You can provide information to us by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a form that is less than a minute to fill out. When you click "submit," it notifies me, and I always look forward to following up with our guests each week.

If text messaging isn't your thing, please swing by our information center located in the fellowship area, right out these doors in the lobby. We have a gift there for you just as a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. Again, we are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

Today we wrap up a teaching series where we've been looking at the 7 "I AM" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. We have talked through the reference in Exodus 13 where God told Moses to say to Pharaoh that "I Am" is the one sending you. So, Jesus using the phrase "I Am," is intentionally drawing us to realize that Jesus is God.

We've talked about how Jesus is the bread of life. That He is the source of sustaining true life. Jesus said that He is the light of the world. That is that Jesus pushes back the darkness in our lives. We looked at, "I Am the gate," and "I am the good Shepherd." That being that Jesus is the protection against wolves that would come to steal, kill and destroy the sheep. Last week we looked at Jesus being The Way, The truth, and The Life and that no one gets to Heaven except through Him as the Lord and Savior of their life. And that Jesus is the only way.

Today, Jesus says to us, "I am the vine." So, I want to invite you to take your bibles and turn with me to John chapter 15. We are going to be in the opening verses of this chapter this morning. And one of the key teachings of John 15 is when Jesus said, *"apart from me you can do nothing."*

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Air Conditioning Disconnected

The other day, I came home from the church, and when I walked into the house, a heat wave hit me. I said, "Whoa! It's hot in this house." Cathy and the kids had been making dinner and I guess they had gotten use to the gradual increase in temperature in the house.

So, I go over to the thermostat, you know, to adjust the temperature, and the thermostat was blank. I thought, "Ah! That's why it's hot in the house." So, I changed out the batteries and plugged the thermostat back into the wall and set the temperature. I walked away thinking, the house will cool down, now.

But after a few minutes, it was still hot and come to think of it, I didn't hear the AC kick on. That's strange. So, I go out to the outside unit to check it out. Now, you need to know something about me. I know absolutely nothing about that kind of stuff. Zero. But I go out to the unit, and like every other man, I go out there and "look at it." And when I say look at it, I mean, I just looked at it. The thought came to me, "I don't know what I'm doing out here. There's a fan, some wires, and it looks normal to me."

Well, I do know enough to know that there is a fuse box for outside units. So, I lift up the door and I pull the fuses out of the box. I'm looking at the fuses and I'm thinking, "I mean, this all looks normal to me." But then again, what do I know. So, I plug the fuses back in thinking, maybe that's reset. You know, like a phone reset. But it did nothing.

So, I walk back in, and I think, I'm going to have to call someone. All the while, the house is just getting warmer. Air is not blowing, mind you, but cooking in the kitchen, milling around, I was watching the temperature on the thermostat just climb. So, I'm thinking, it's after hours, no one could come until tomorrow, and I'm going to have to sleep in a hot house. That's such a defeating realization, isn't it?! Have you ever had that experience? It's terrible.

So, I pick up my phone to set up a visit. In that moment, a light bulb went off in my mind. Chris, you haven't checked the breaker box in the house yet. Maybe something tripped. So, I go to the breaker box, and I noticed that there was one breaker that was indeed tripped. Now, I don't know about your house, but the person that installed our breaker box was either a medical doctor before or they wrote in another language. Written out to the side of the breaker that was tripped was, well it's not legible. So, I thought, "Well, it goes to something. Let's

reset the breaker.” Low and behold, the AC kicked on! My family cheered and I ran through the house singing, “All I do is win, win, win, no matter what!” And we had a victory party know that we weren’t going to have to sweat sleep.

When the breaker tripped, the AC unit was no longer connected to a source of power. As a result, it could not produce what it was designed to produce. It didn’t matter that everything looked the part and everything was there, it wasn’t connected to the source of power.

The metaphor that Jesus uses in this I Am statement is a vineyard, in particular a vine and branches. He will also introduce us to a vinedresser. And the point that Jesus is going to make is that apart from Him we are not just ineffective, but rather we are dead.

BACKGROUND TEACHING:

Before we dive into what we learn from this passage, I want to set the scene for us. John chapter 15 is a part of what scholars call the upper room discourse. A discourse is a talk or teaching. There are several discourses throughout the gospel accounts. The upper room discourse begins in chapter 13 and goes through chapter 17.

It is named the upper room discourse because Jesus gathers with His disciples, in the upper room, and He observes the Passover with them. This would prove to be Jesus’ last Passover and He institutes the Lord’s Supper, or Communion, in the upper room.

Now, when you come to chapter 15, the upper room discourse continues but it changes settings. At the end of chapter 14, Jesus asked the disciples to rise and go from here, from the upper room. At this point, Judas has already left the group to go betray Jesus and set in motion His arrest, fake trial, and ultimately His crucifixion.

By the time we get to chapter 17 of John, Jesus and the disciples are in the Garden of Gethsemane. So, they get up from dinner, start making their way toward the Garden, and most likely they are walking through what is known as the Kidron Valley.

While we don’t know for sure, it is very plausible that Jesus and His disciples pass by a vineyard along the way.ⁱⁱ That would have served as the perfect

object lesson for Jesus’ teaching on the vine and the branches. It is here that Jesus says, John 15, beginning in verse 1, *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

What we see in this teaching is what I believe to be 4 marks of the Christian life. There are 4 aspects of following Jesus. So, today, I want to glean from this passage that there is professing, pruning, persevering, and proving. That will serve as our outline this morning. 4 marks of the Christian life.

MESSAGE:

The first mark is...

1) Professing.

When I say the word, professing, I mean that the first mark of the Christian life is professing Jesus as Lord, Savior, trusting Him for who He is. In the opening verse of chapter 15, Jesus says, *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”* What is the idea behind Jesus being the true vine?

The word translated as “true,” means real or genuine.ⁱⁱⁱ Obviously, Jesus is distinguishing Himself as the “true vine,” and is therefore making reference to another vine only being a representation. He could be saying that the grapevines that they are walking by is just a depiction of who He really is. But I think it is something else.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is referred to as God’s vine.^{iv} In fact, on the doors of the temple in Jesus’ day, they had golden vines and grapes embossed on them.^v And we see this idea of Israel being God’s vine in other passages of Scripture. Psalm 80, verse 8 says, *“⁸You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.”* This is referring to the nation of Israel.

So, I think Jesus is not only using a vineyard as an object lesson, but He is also referring to the nation of Israel in His statement. Israel depicted God’s vine, but

Jesus is the true, the actual, vine. To profess Jesus as Lord is to acknowledge Him as such.

Now, there are three characters in Jesus' teaching here. The true vine, that being Jesus. The vinedresser, that being God the Father. And then the branches, that being followers of Jesus. If you are in Christ, you are included in this teaching as a branch. You are a branch, and I am a branch.

Another aspect of professing Jesus as Lord is acknowledging who He is and knowing who we are. We are not the vine. We are not the source. No, we are a branch. A branch is completely dependent on the vine in order to do what it is supposed to do. As a result, to call Jesus Lord is to call Him as the boss of our life, the source of our life, and to place your life under His authority.

Now, I want you to see the very personal nature of this conversation. 11 times over the course of 8 verses, Jesus uses the word, "you," plural.^{vi} He says, *"Abide in me, and I in you. You abide in me. You are the branches. Apart from me you can do nothing."* You can see the personal nature of these comments.

A relationship with Jesus is what is important to see here. To profess Jesus as Lord, means that we enter into a relationship with Jesus. In other words, Jesus isn't just a box we check so that we are good with God. No, following Jesus requires a personal relationship with Him. We must **"abide"** in Him and He in us.

The first mark of the Christian life is professing Jesus as Lord. The second mark of the Christian life is...

2) Pruning.

We have professing and then we have pruning. Jesus says in verse 2 in John 15, *"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he **takes away**, and every branch that does bear fruit he **prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**"* A part of the Christian journey is being pruned by God.

The word translated, "takes away," means to remove.^{vii} The word translated, "prunes," means to cleanse or purify.^{viii} So, God, the vinedresser, removes that which is dead from our lives, and purifies that which is overgrown in our lives. The truth is that we all have areas where we need the vinedresser go to work. God works in and through us to remove that which is not like Jesus. These

things can be sin or habits that hold us back. They can be relationships that are toxic. Or they can be removing things so as to provide rest that is needed. And Jesus said that there's a purpose for the pruning, that we might bear more fruit.

Now, I'm not a gardener, but I know enough to know that pruning something isn't pleasant. I mean, it involves shears, and trimmers, and loppers. I don't know about you; those are not tools that I want used on me! Yet, the vinedresser does that so that you and I might produce more fruit.

How does God do that? Well, it is a process known as sanctification. That is a big theological word that means the process of making a person holy, making us like Jesus. And truth be told, sanctification is sometimes painful and uncomfortable. But in those seasons, we must remind ourselves that the end result is amazing. Just like rose bushes need to be trimmed back, that trimming produces more beautiful roses. And though pruning seasons are hard, they are essential. One of the marks of the Christian life is pruning.

The Holy Spirit prunes us in many ways. I want to mention just a couple. The first way the Holy Spirit works to prune us is in the illumination of God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 says, *"¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* The Holy Spirit takes the study of God's Word and convicts us, revealing to us, areas needing to change. Sometimes God's Word comforts us, but other times it confronts us.^{ix} This is why Bible study is vitally important to the believer.

Another way The Holy Spirit prunes us is through God's people. The truth is that I need others to speak truth into my life. And you need others to challenge you. Yes, we all need to be loved, but perhaps the greatest display of love is when someone says, "Chris, you're out of line here."

Listen, I know none of us are jumping at the opportunity to have God prune us. It's hard. But I want you to grab ahold of this picture. When a master gardener prunes, he tends to the plant. He looks intently at the plant identifying what is stunting growth. In other words, the vine dresser is closest to the plant when he's pruning it. The same is true with God. Yes, pruning is difficult, uneasy, and uncomfortable, but know that God is close to you in those seasons.^x

Marks of the Christian life is professing and pruning. The third mark is...

3) Persevering.

One of the words that is repeated so much in John 15 is the word, “abide.” Look at verses 6 and 7 of John 15. *“**6**If anyone does not **abide** in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **7**If you **abide** in me, and my words **abide** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”* A few things I want to point out here.

First, the word “abide” means to remain, to continue in. One of the marks of the Christian life is that we remain in Christ even when it’s not easy; we persevere. When we are not all in, we will abandon ship at first challenge. When we come to Christ, we are not promised an easy road. No, Jesus said, “In this world, you will have trouble. But to take heart, He has overcome the world.”

James 1:2-4 says, *“**2**Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **3**for you know that the testing of your faith produces **steadfastness**. [Some translations say perseverance]. **4**And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* Trials will come, we must abide, remain in Christ.

The second thing that I want to mention in these verses deals with eternal security of the believer. That’s big words for once saved, always saved. Perhaps you’ve heard said that way.

Here’s why I bring that up. In verse 6, Jesus says, *“**6**If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”* Does this mean that someone can come to faith and if they don’t remain in Jesus then they are cut off from Him and lose their salvation?

Listen, I don’t believe this verse is talking about losing salvation. The reason for that is because in verse 3, Jesus said, *“**3**Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”* So, what does Jesus mean about being cut off, thrown away and burned?

Remember who Jesus is talking to here. He’s talking to the 11. Judas has already left. And what I think Jesus is saying is that **abiding is not about losing as much as it is about revealing**. Jesus isn’t saying you can lose your salvation, but He is saying that those that are pretending to be in the vine are

going to be found out. Our faith is often revealed in the storms of life. Those that continue in Jesus, even when it’s hard, they are connected to the vine. Those that abandon ship, well they were never connected to begin with.

So, we’ve talked about the persevering piece meaning to abide in Christ and that it is revealing. But what about verse 7? You can’t just skip over that! If you remain in Jesus, you can ask for whatever you want?

I don’t have the time to adequately address this. Maybe some other time I can dive into it. Listen, Jesus is not a genie in a bottle where we can get a little Jesus and He will grant our wishes. Here’s what I think the point is. When we abide in Jesus, our heart aligns with His, we so desire His will that our desires align with His desires. That will be expressed in what we ask of Him. Remember, Jesus says, *“**7**If you abide in me, **and my words** abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* So, in essence, we are asking for what Jesus is asking. It’s His words.

The point is that we are to remain in, continue in Him. We’ve discovered the marks of the Christian are professing, pruning, and persevering. The fourth mark of the Christian life is...

4) Proving.

The Christian life is not talk; it’s walk. Not perfection, mind you, but evidence of a life-giving relationship with Jesus. Becoming more like Him each and every day.

Verse 8 of John 15 says, *“**8**By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so **prove** to be my disciples.”* The proof of a Christian is found in the fruit that we bear.

Matthew 7:18-20 says, *“**18**A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. **19**Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20**Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”* Now, this is said in the context of identifying false teachers. But the same can be said of those that are truly Jesus’ disciples. The proof is in the fruit.

James 2:17 says, *“**17**So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”* Now, James is not talking about being saved through our works, but rather our works are evidence of our salvation. Same idea. The proof is in the fruit.

A tree is known by what it produces, and a Christian is known by the same. But what is the fruit that a Christian produces? Again, context is key in knowing what Jesus is saying here. I think it would be easy for us to turn to the fruits of the Spirit to answer this question. And I think that is applicable. But I think that Jesus has a particular fruit in mind when He talks about proving to be His disciple. So, let's look at the context.

John 15:9-17. ***9As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17These things I command you, so that you will love one another.***

I think the greatest proof of a relationship with Jesus is love. Love for God, love for people, and love for Jesus Bride, the Church. Do you love? Do you see past the hurt in other people's lives and truly love them? Do you love other believers? One of the things that I believe caused Jesus to have such disdain for the Pharisees is the fact that they didn't love people. No, they looked down on others. They took advantage of others. And this differentiated the "religious" from the true followers of Jesus.

So, we see the four marks of the Christian life. Professing Jesus as Lord. Pruning areas of our lives not in alignment with Him. Persevering in Christ even in the difficult times. And then proving we are abiding in Christ by loving others.

CONCLUSION:

As our worship team makes their way to come and lead us in a time of response, I think our message this morning lends itself to self-reflection. It causes us to ask the question, "Am I in Christ? Am I producing fruit?"

If you are here today and you have questions about trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior, I want you to know that we are here for you. In a moment, I am going to pray and we will all start singing, but our elders will make themselves available here at the front and would love nothing more than to visit with you about what it means to trust Jesus as Lord. Let's settle that today.

Others of you are reflecting on the question, "How do I persevere in the midst of the challenge I'm walking through?" You desire to abide in Christ, but it's hard. Maybe it's a spiritual battle you are dealing with. Maybe it's a financial battle. Maybe it's even something someone has done to you that is causing you to ask where God is? Maybe it's a mental challenge or a relational challenge. Whatever it is, you're just trying to hold on.

If that's you, we would love to pray with you. We would like to join you in your prayers asking The Lord to move on your behalf. If we are honest, there are times in our faith journey that we can hold on, and there are other times that we need others to hold on for us. Would you allow us to do that this morning?

I'm going to pray, we will stand and sing, but most importantly, let's all respond to the prompting of The Lord on our hearts. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

- ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21*, Moody Press: Chicago, 2006; Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2000; Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Communicator's Commentary: John*, Word Books: Waco, 1985; Jonathan Pokluda, "I AM: The True Vine," sermon preached at Harris Creek Baptist Church, Waco, TX, April 2, 2023, accessed online: <https://www.harris creek.org/sermons?sapurl=LytmYzAwL2xiL21pLytycTZqcmh4P2VtYmVkpXRYdWUmc mVjZW50Um91dGU9YXBwLndYi1hcHAubGlicmFyeS5saXN0JnJlY2VudFJvdXRlU2x1Zz0lMkZjZjN3amti>; Esteban Shedd, *The 'I AM' Statements of Jesus Course*, published by The Gospel Coalition; accessed online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/the-i-am-statements-of-jesus/#course-introduction>; Michael Youssef, "There is an I in I Am: The Vine," sermon preached at The Apostle's Church, July 21, 2022, accessed online: <https://www.itw.org/listen/teaching/series/there-is-an-i-in-the-i-am/part-6>; Matt Chandler, "I AM: The True Vine," sermon preached at The Village Church, March 19, 2016, accessed online: <https://www.thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons/the-true-vine?mode=listen>; Skip Heitzig, Various Sermons: "Life Lessons From Grape Growers Parts 1 and 2," "John 14:12-15:27," taught at Calvary Albuquerque, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/>.
- ⁱⁱ Skip Heitzig.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Strong's Concordance, 228.
- ^{iv} MacArthur, 143.
- ^v Heitzig.
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} Strong's Concordance, 142.
- ^{viii} Strong's Concordance, 2508.
- ^{ix} Quip taken from Skip Heitzig.
- ^x I have heard this taught before and cannot remember the source.