

John 76 – I AM The True Vine

02/08/2026

Scripture 1: (Jn. 14:27-15:8 ESV)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide 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. I 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. 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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Scripture 2: (Ps. 80:1-19 ESV)

To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. A Testimony. Of Asaph, a Psalm.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!

O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us an object of contention for our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!

You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.

Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!

But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name! Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

Sermon:

Better comprehending our union with Christ is one of the most important spiritual and thoughtful endeavors that Christians should strive for. Our union with Christ is such an important doctrine because every consequential effect of our predestined faith: our regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and future glorification; is derived from it. Yet we also must recognize and appreciate the fact that we never will (that we can never) fully understand it. We may understand the fact of our being united to Him with our minds, but the means and why's of this union often escapes our comprehension.

- We know that we have been united to Christ through our baptism; united into His death and into His resurrection (Romans 6:3-8); that we have been brought into covenant with Him and adopted as fellow children of God, like Him (John 1:12).
- We know that we are clothed “*with the garments of salvation*” and covered with Christ's “*robe of righteousness*” (Isa. 61:10 ESV); justified before the Father with Christ's righteousness, through our faith in Jesus and not by our works under the law (Galatians 2:16), so that now “*...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (Rom. 5:1 ESV).
- We know that we are made to become “*a temple of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor. 6:19 ESV); that we are made to become the spiritual dwelling place of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (John 14:23); and that we have been (and are being) sanctified to live lives of holiness.

The great importance of our union with Christ is a significant reason for why Jesus spent His last evening of teaching, teaching it and explaining it to His disciples: making it a central theme running throughout the entire conversation; because our union is the cause for our hope in Him and because it is a great source for our spiritual encouragement. Remembering and meditating upon our union with Christ, is comforting when we feel alone; whenever we feel as if we have been abandoned or forgotten by God, because then, we are remembering that Jesus promised us, that “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*” (Jn. 14:18-20 ESV) {He would not leave us as orphans; that we would know that He is in our Father, that we are in Him, and that He is in us.}. Remembering our union and keeping it in the forefront of mind, will be helpful as we proceed.

Jesus told His disciples, “*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.*”. Let us put ourselves in the disciples' place and think through what Jesus has just said.

- Jesus has been telling them that He was “leaving”; that soon, He was going to go somewhere without them, somewhere that they could not now follow (13:36).
- Jesus had told them that He would soon be betrayed by Judas (13:26) and also, that soon He would be denied by Peter (13:38).
- Then He said to them, “*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*” (Jn. 14:1 ESV); telling them to have “Have faith”, to “Trust Him”, and to not be worried or anxious about it.
- Jesus had explained that Him leaving would be a good thing for them;
 - that He was leaving to go prepare a place for them (14:2);
 - that He was going to return and then bring them to Himself (14:3);

- and that also, He was going to ask His Father to send them “another *paraklete*” to remain with them until then (14:16).

Now obviously, if Jesus was about to leave them then, of course, He would not be able to talk with them; that was just common sense. However, what may not have made as much sense, was the reason He gave: His explanation for “Why” He will not be able to talk with them and for “Why” He will be leaving them; “[because] *the ruler of this world is coming*.”. But, who was that?

- We know the answer: Satan, the Devil. Eventually, John will help us to reach this answer, when he records the Revelation. But, in that moment, for the disciples, that answer would not have been as obvious or plain.

That answer seems obvious to us today, as 21st Century Christians, because we have nearly two thousand years worth of Christian theology and interpretation to teach it to us, but Jews during the Second Temple period did not have that luxury. Instead, the better question to ask would be, “Who did they understand the “*ruler of this world*” (τοῦ κόσμου ἄρχῳ) to be?”; “Who did they understand, think, or assume Jesus was meaning, in that moment?”.

Yet that question does not have an easy answer because, within their cultural context (as Jewish Jews; considered as religion and ethnicity) and their political moment (since Judea was a territory within the Roman Empire and under Roman rule), there may have been three reasonable interpretations of that expression. {Please note that these are not necessarily in any kind of “ranked” order.}

- The first was the current Roman Emperor, Tiberius, who may have been entitled to claim the moniker of “ruler of the world”, since the Roman Empire was the largest and most powerful contemporary political entity in the known western hemisphere.
- The second was the LORD, the God of Israel, whom Second Temple Judaism affirmed as the ultimate sovereign over all creation; above even the Roman Emperor. {Jews and Judaism was afforded many unique privileges in the Roman Empire because of their zeal for the LORD; concessions which were ostensibly granted to preserve peace within the Empire. One such example is that, rather than participating in the activities of the “Imperial Cult”, like worshiping the (deceased) “divine Augustus Caesar”, or paying certain taxes intended to support such activities, the Jews were permitted to offer sacrifices and prayers in Jerusalem, to the LORD, on behalf of the Emperor (for his benefit). **(Citation Needed)}**
- The third option, may have been Satan, also called: the Devil, Beelzebub, or Belial¹. However, it is a difficult point to argue because of our interpretive Christian bias. We do not well understand what degree of power, influence, and control Second Temple Judaism assumed Satan possessed over and within the world. Although the Dead Sea Scrolls provide us with some insight into the views of the Qumran community, describing an expected final, eschatological war between the LORD and His forces {the Qumran Community; the “true, righteous Jews”} against the Devil's forces, the “sons of darkness”; but, it is not clear whether 1st Century Jews, would have considered Satan as the “*ruler of this world*”. We know that they were aware of his negative, corrupting, and evil influencing presence, but we really do not know if they considered Satan to be as great of an adversary or, as powerful of an enemy, as we Christians understand, believe, and know the Devil to actually be.

My opinion and my expectation is that they would have thought, if they thought anything about it, that Jesus was implying He would soon be arrested by the Roman authorities, “In the name of the Emperor!”. After all,

1 “The War Scroll” or “The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness”
<https://www.qumran.org/js/qumran/hss/1qm>

Jesus had just been “acclaimed King” by the Jewish Jerusalem crowd, six days before; an event which could have been used as a pretext to accuse Him of sedition or of promoting rebellion against Rome {rebellion against Herod Antipas would also have been interpreted and applied as rebellion against Rome, since Herod's position, authority, and power came from Rome's investiture}. If this were the case, then the disciples would have had reasonable cause to be nervous, anxious, and worried.

Next, Jesus declared that this “*ruler*”, whomever he might be, that “*He has no claim on me...*”. So, if the disciples thought this was a reference to Rome, then they may have understood Jesus to be either proclaiming His innocence, in regards to transgressing Roman law or, denying Rome's right of authority over Him; proclaiming His personal freedom from Roman rule and assuming the revolutionary mantle which He had been offered.

Then, He asserted, “*...I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.*” Jesus explained and qualified precisely whose authority He recognized and was subordinate too: God's. Jesus was not rejecting all governmental authority, but rather, He claimed to be acting under His Father's authority, acting according to His divine command.

Lastly, Jesus explained why he was going to allow these things to happen, why He was going to submit Himself to abuse by the exercise of unjust and unrighteous authority, “*...so that the world may know that I love the Father.*” His willing submission would be a public (and spectacular) demonstration of His love for God the Father, through His active obedience to God's will and command.

However, as a technical note; immediately after this, Jesus next said, “*Rise, let us go from here.*”. This remark is near the center of what is commonly called “the Upper Room Discourse”, but there are a variety of opinions concerning what precisely was meant by it. The 20th Century biblical scholar, F.F. Bruce, offered one suggestion while Matthew Henry, the late 17th Century English Presbyterian offered two more. Bruce² suggests that this was a displaced narrative marker that better belongs at the end of Chapter 17; however, he also admits that, while a compelling idea, there is no textual or manuscript evidence supporting this displacement theory. Whereas Henry³ suggests that although this verbal note could have marked a transition within their local surrounding, such as their moving from the dining table to a separate sitting area, a reasonable assumption if it were the end of the meal, but he would rather interpret it as carrying the sense of “‘Arise, let us go to meet it,' instead of going out of our way to miss it”. Henry prefers to interpret this as a statement of conviction and determination, by Jesus, to do precisely as the Father has commanded Him. {Henry also note the opinion of Dr. [Thomas] Goodwin, that Jesus was “in all haste to go forth to suffer and die, was afraid of slipping the time of Judas's meeting him: Arise, says he, let us go hence but he looks upon the glass, as it were, sees it not quite out, and therefore sits down again, and preaches another sermon.”} Personally, I am inclined to agree with Matthew Henry, that this statement by Jesus was regarding His determination and His desire for the coming ordeal to begin soon, so that it would be over sooner.

Returning to His emphasis upon our union with Him, now Jesus utters His seventh, and technically last, “I AM” declaration {However, there will be another *ego eimi* statement during His arrest in the Garden (18:5-6), but that one is not usually associated with these others because, the seven are understood as metaphors which claim or explain something about Jesus' divinity while the eighth is viewed as a simple proclamation of fact; of “I AM”.} saying, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*”. Whenever we study the “I AM” statements, we commonly consider them within their immediate context of John. We tend to only consider the most obvious or superficial aspects of them and, we tend to consider them more in light of our recent theological understandings and developments, rather than from the perspective of biblical theology (of whole Bible theology). By doing this, we only scratch the surface and hardly touch “the meat” of what Jesus was

2 F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*. 1983, 306

3 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary, volume V*. 1121-1122

saying. Mind you, there is still a lot of good benefit to be had from such studies, because there are many good applications and great comfort that we can still draw out from just simply seeing Jesus as: “the light of the world”, “the bread from heaven”, “the door [of the sheepfold]”, “the good shepherd”, “the resurrection”, and as “the way, the truth, and the life”; but, there is much more fullness to be found in why Jesus uses these specific analogies.

Previously, I have explained that Jesus identifies Himself with the LORD through these declarations, and He claims to be something (to possess or be the expression of something) that is indicative of a divine attribute or quality. Whenever He does this, He always draws upon something from the Hebrew Scriptures; from something older in redemptive history. Back when Jesus said, “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*” (Jn. 6:35 ESV), a statement drawing upon their memory of the LORD providing Israel with *manna* in the wilderness (Exodus 16:31-35); in addition to claiming to be the divine source of life, Jesus was also claiming to be our Provider and Sustainer; characteristics that are identified with the LORD and His covenant promises (Leviticus 26:9; Deuteronomy 32:7-14). So, when Jesus says, “*I am the true vine*”, we need to be asking “What vine?”, “What is He drawing upon?” and, “What is He saying about Himself?”.

- Thinking of this only in the superficial sense, as a horticultural metaphor, we may understand this passage as an invitation for us to {abide in Christ}; to “rest” in Him; to find our “comfort” in Him; and to draw upon our faith in Him, to strengthen us and help us to bear good spiritual fruit. However, while those are all true, that interpretation and those applications are greatly enhanced when we better understand the originating “root” of this “vine”.

Unlike the prevalence of shepherds and sheep imagery in the Old Testament (being used especially as a metaphor for kings and their subjects, or leaders and their followers), “vines” are an uncommon image. The type of vine that is most commonly mentioned in Scripture is the grape vine; a symbol which was notably used as a sign of earthly, temporal prosperity, “*And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.*” (1 Ki. 4:25 ESV). Meanwhile, Grape vines have a thick and woody central vine with many smaller, softer, greener, and more flexible branches shooting off in every possible direction. Some of these branches wrap themselves around things, to help hold and support the vine, while other branches will grow flowers and, LORD-willing, eventually bear fruit. Grapes would be transformed into wine; a symbol for joy and gladness, because it was used for celebrations, and a symbol of prosperity and contentment, because wine is a product of surplus and abundance, not immediate need or use.

The most common analogical use of “vine” in Scripture, was as a descriptor for God's chosen people, Israel; not God. This fact makes Jesus' seventh “I AM” declaration more unusual or special, and therefore, even more important for us to understand rightly and wholly. To help us better understand it, we need to consider Psalm 80.

- The psalmist wrote about the LORD's providential work for Israel, His chosen people, saying “***You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.***”; describing the Exodus from Egypt, the *charam* (or conquest of Canaan), and the establishment of the Davidic/Solomonic Kingdom.
- Then, the psalmist prays, “*Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, **and for the son** whom you made strong for yourself. They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!*” , describing the vine, the totality of God's people, as God's son.

- This is where strong biblical literacy improves our ability to interpret Scripture. We should remember that the LORD had first declared this fact back in Exodus 4, “*Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son...*” (Exod. 4:22 ESV).
- Therefore, if “the vine” is Israel and, if Israel is God's “son” (God's firstborn son and heir), then this analogy of “vine” also describes God's son. If “the vine” is God's son, then the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is also “the vine”; a vine to which everyone who believes and trusts in Christ, belongs and is united to.
- But that is not all. The psalmist continues to pray, “*But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!*”; expressions which describe the LORD's regent and delegate; describing the One to whom the LORD has ascribed all of His same power and authority, whom He charges to act on His behalf, as His “image”; the eschatological “son of man” seen by Daniel (Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 28:16-20), a title and role expressly, and publicly, claimed by Jesus.
 - I will not go into it fully now, but this connection between John 15 and Psalm 80 transforms our understanding about several relationships: the relationship between the LORD and Christ, the LORD and His chosen people (Israel/Church), Christ and the world, as well as between the Church/Israel (as God's chosen people) and the world.
 - The LORD and Christ: as Father and Son; and, as King and Regent
 - The LORD and Israel/the Church: as a Father and His children; and as a King and His sub-regents, as His vassal-images
 - Christ and the world: as the Just King and those who are judged; those who are subject to the King's power and authority
 - The Church/Israel and the world: as being a lower court of judges, sitting in judgment over all of creation (Luke 22:28-30; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 4:4, 20:4)

Are the dots starting to connect? Do you find the internal consistency and connectivity within Scripture wonderfully beautiful?

Jesus has been building up to this moment throughout the entire evening's discourse. Jesus said, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*” or {I am the true Israel, and my Father is the one who “cultivates” me; who takes of me and provides everything for me.}. Here Jesus makes a federal claim with serious covenantal implications. But, before we examine those implications, let us look and see why Jesus needed to make this claim: why Jesus needs to be the “true” Israel, rather than the Jewish people (the natural, ethnic descendants of Jacob).

- Echoing the language of Psalm 80, the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed against the people of Judah (~610 BC), “*For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, 'I will not serve.' Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore. Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord GOD.*” (Jer. 2:20-22 ESV). The prophet recalls the Exodus from Egypt and the incident with the golden calf at Mount Sinai; where Israel rejected the LORD, to prefer an idol of gold. Not only that, he also recollects the many times when Israel succumbed to Ba'alite idolatry and Asherah worship; all of their countless altars, built upon “high places” (2 Kings 16:4). All of Israel was guilty of apostasy, of habitually turning away from the One True God.

- Likewise, the prophet Hosea, had previously proclaimed the same charge against the Northern Kingdom (~730 BC), “*Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars and destroy their pillars. For now they will say: "We have no king, for we do not fear the LORD; and a king-- what could he do for us?"*” (Hos. 10:1-3 ESV). Hosea went even further with his charges against Israel; accusing them of not fearing the LORD, the One who planted them and provided them with all of their bounty; accusing them of desiring to be their own masters, to be free from obedience to either God or His king. The prophet charged them that, although they produced fruit, their apostasy had turned it sour and bad.
- Truly the “vine” of Israel was in danger of being cut off entirely (Numbers 15:31); surely, they deserved.
- But, there was not a total absence of hope for God's chosen people. The prophet Zechariah also prophesied (~510 BC), “*But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.*” (Zech. 8:11-12 ESV). The LORD would not deal with “the remnant” of Israel, in the same way as He had done before, a clear reference to the “new covenant” that had been prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34).
 - He promised a “*sowing of peace*”, like what Jesus had just promised His disciples, telling them “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.*” (Jn. 14:27 ESV) and then, God promised this remnant fruitfulness and their possession of “*all these things*”; all of His promised blessings.

However, the presence of a remnant logically implies that, although diminished, the Jewish people should still remain “Israel”. Except, {and if I am wrong about this, I hope that one of our many gardeners here would correct me}, a plant that has been cut back extremely far (especially after being cut back to remove dead, rotten, or diseased portions) does not stand a good chance of survival, if it is left in place. But, its chances for survival and thriving may improve if it is transplanted; if it is re-planted; or, if it is grafted into a stronger and more healthy plant. So, that this surviving remnant of God's chosen people Israel: everyone who belongs to Christ; all those who have been given to the Son by the Father (John 10:29); everyone whom the LORD has predestined unto life (Romans 8:29-30); all of God's Elect, still needed to be (re)grafted into “*the true vine*” of Israel (Romans 11:17-24; although the Apostle Paul uses the analogy of an olive tree instead). They needed to be brought into union with Jesus Christ: God the Son; the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*.

The most important part of this to remember, as relating to us, everyone who belongs to God (everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ) must have been (must be) grafted into “*the true vine*” of Israel; everyone, even from before the very beginning, and that this en-grafting only ever happens through our God given faith in the LORD, in Jesus Christ. Our heavenly Father is “*the vinedresser*”. He alone chooses which branches to cut and which branches to graft in. He makes the cuts and He grafts them in, together with the Holy Spirit: our regenerating, faith-filling, and sanctifying *paraklete*.

- Adam and Eve, by receiving God's grace and promise after their transgression, were grafted into the vine of Christ by their faith and trust in Him.
- Enoch, who “*walked with God*” (Genesis 5:22), was surely grafted into the vine of Christ by their faith in Him, since Enoch was translated directly into heaven.
- Noah, Abraham, and his offspring (his heirs) were grafted into the vine of Christ through God's gracious covenant for salvation (Genesis 6:17-22, 12:1-3, 17:4-8), by their faith in Him.

- The great mixed multitude of people who followed Moses out of Egypt (Exodus 12:37-38) and who became constituted as the people of Israel, were grafted into the vine of Christ through their faith in the LORD; a faith confirmed and proven by their obedience (their faithfulness).
- Likewise, the whole and entire Church, all those who belonged to the old covenant and all those belonging to the new covenant, are graciously grafted into the vine of Jesus Christ through our faith, trust, and total dependence upon Him (Ephesians 2:8).

Yet where did all these branches, those being grafted in, come from?

In addition to “the vine” as Israel, Scripture also describes plainly, another vine, {another reference able to be drawn through strong biblical literacy}, a wicked vine, a vine that grows contrary to the LORD's design; “the vine of Sodom”: “*For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps.*” (Deut. 32:32-33 ESV). This vine represents all of the enemies of God and His chosen people: all of the idolaters and pagans, sinners and atheists, Gentiles and Jews. Everyone redeemed by the work of Christ, everyone who becomes a Christian and gets grafted into Christ's covenant, must first have been cut off from that “*vine of Sodom*” before they were grafted into the “*true vine*” of Christ.

- This is another way of envisioning what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, “*And such were some of you.*” (1 Cor. 6:11 ESV); that we are no longer who or what we were before we were in Christ.

Finally, Jesus warns us “*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.*”; giving us a warning that also explains so much of Old Testament history. Ever since Adam walked in the Garden of Eden with God, humanity (God's image), has been expected to bear good fruit; to bear the good fruit of righteousness: justice, mercy, and love. Yet, we never do, not on our own, anyways. Instead, we always choose to use our freedom of will to bear bad, wicked, and rotten fruit.

- Adam sinned and so, he and Eve were “pruned” and “cut off” from Paradise. They were “pruned” from the vine of self-righteousness and then grafted into the “true vine” of Christ's grace. They were removed from being dependent on themselves, to being dependent entirely upon Jesus.
- After murdering his brother Abel, Cain was pruned away from Adam's branch and so, Seth was able to bear more fruit.
- But during the days of Noah, nearly every branch on the vine was cut off by the Flood, except for Noah's shoot, which had been grown from Seth's righteous branch.
- Later Abram/Abraham's branch was chosen to survive while the branch of his brother Nahor was not. Then the branches of Ishmael and Esau were pruned, so that Isaac and Jacob could bear fruit.
- Eventually, after the days of Solomon, during the reign of King Hoshea, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were cut off by the Assyrians, on the LORD's behalf. This was followed by Nebuchadnezzar's pruning of Judah during the reign of King Zedekiah, when their best and brightest were taken off into exile and captivity. Yet, as God had promised, seventy years later, the LORD grafted a remnant back into the vine, when He allowed the Jews to return home; to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.
- Lastly, after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there was a lot of gardening going on; a lot of branches were being pruned or cut off, and a lot more were being grafted in. Yet through it all, the “*true vine*” of Jesus Christ, always remained the same, just as He always has and does.

Which returns us back to where we began with this passage; our union with Christ. Are you beginning to see just how important and foundational our union with, our union into Jesus Christ is?

So far, we have started to consider it in regards to the connection between being united to Christ and being a part of the Church. We have seen how, by our union through our be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we have access to a wonderful depth of spiritual resources. We have seen how, by our union to Christ, our Christ-likeness is to be shown through our good works of love: for one another and for others; by echoing His exemplary love for us.

I will close today with a question for us each to ponder:

- As branches, are we not bearing fruit or are we bearing “bad fruit”, and thus are in danger of being cut off; or, are we fruit-bearing branches in need of some more spiritual pruning?

AMEN