

John 15: Jesus' "Viability" Theology

The Paradigm of Viability: The Gardener

John 15.1-4

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

² 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.

³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

⁴ Remain in me, as I also 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.

The Character of the Gardner

“I AM the True Vine and my Father is the [True] Husbandman.”

The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by His mighty arm: “Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled; but those who harvest it will eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of My sanctuary.”

ISAIAH 62.8-9

- ❖ Jesus said, “My Father is the Husbandman.” Jesus previously told a parable about an owner who planted a vineyard and hired husbandmen to tend it and gain a profit for him (Mark 12.1-12). The husbandmen, however, turned out to be traitorous, violent to the owner’s accountants, and covetous of the harvest. Jesus would have us understand that in this paradigm his Father is the *true* husbandman.

- ❖ The first vine planted by the Lord (Israel) proved to be a corrupt vine (Isaiah 5.1-2). The husbandmen to whom He entrusted the care of the vine (religious leaders) proved to be traitorous and violent toward the accountants (the prophets). When Jesus told this parable, the religious leaders understood that he was referring to them. Jesus said that finally, the owner (God) sent his son whom he loved and whom the husbandmen killed. Jesus concluded this parable by quoting from Psalm 118—

*The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.
The LORD has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.*

PSALM 118.22-24

- ❖ This parable reveals what Jesus said in John 5, “*My Father is at work, to this very day.*”

- ❖ In a passage filled with the imagery of vines and fruitfulness, God spoke through the prophet, Jeremiah, of a time when, in contrast to impending judgment, He would do a new work—

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will plant the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of people and of animals. Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the LORD.

“In those days people will no longer say,

*‘The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’*

Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.”

❖ The True Husbandman then revealed the exceptional nature of this new work—

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

JEREMIAH 31.31-34

❖ The writer of Hebrews quoted this passage as being prophetic testimony given by the Holy Spirit about the atoning, new covenant work of Christ (Hebrews 10.14-18).

- ❖ In John 15.1, the NIV translates *georgos* as “gardener,” the ESV as “vinedresser,” and the KJV as “husbandman.” *Husbandman* is an older English word that referred to a tenant farmer; the verb “to husband” originally meant “to till, cultivate.”
- ❖ We have now seen God present himself as the one who planted a choice vine (Israel) in his vineyard (Isaiah 5.1-2)—a vine that produced only bad fruit—and as the one who was a husband to Israel who broke covenant with Him (Jeremiah 31.32).
- ❖ Here the character of the True Husbandman shines in glorious brilliance: the Husbandman who is fully committed in covenant love to accomplishing His redemptive purposes. In marriage language, God declared in Isaiah 62.4-5—
“No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”

- ❖ The Apostle Paul, in his discourse in Romans 9-11 about the character and sovereign work of God, made several statements of infinite significance for us—
 - (1) Through the failure of Israel, God brought grace and salvation to the Gentiles;
 - (2) If the root is holy, so are the branches for it is the root that supports the branches;
 - (3) The Gentiles, branches of a wild tree, have been grafted into the true tree and are now nourished by its life.

(See Romans 9.30-33; 11.5-6, 11, 16, 17-21, 25)

- ❖ In words that echo what Jesus will say about the work of the True Husbandman (John 14.2), the Apostle Paul admonished the Roman church—

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

❖ What have we seen of the character of the Gardener?

- ▶ It is because of the covenant love of the True Husbandman (Isaiah 62.4-5),
- ▶ that we have by grace (Romans 9.30; 10.20; 11.5-6),
- ▶ been grafted into the True Vine (Romans 11.17, 24),
- ▶ whose life has made us holy (Romans 11.16; Hebrews 10.10, 14).

Therefore, let us take care to “remain in him” so that we will not fail to bear fruit, but instead, will bear “much fruit” *“to my Father’s glory . . . showing yourselves to be my disciples”* (John 14.8).