

SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 2010

Sunday, March 28, 2010: Jesus, The True Vine

Jesus: The True Vine
John 15: 1 – 17.

I. Introduction.

Some of you will recognize the name Buzz Aldrin as the 80 year old man who is the oldest contestant on the TV show “Dancing with the Stars.” Others will recognize Buzz Aldrin as the astronaut, who became the second man to walk on the moon 40 years ago. Last Sunday, I discovered an interesting fact about Buzz Aldrin. He was the first person—and possibly the only person—to take communion in outer space.[1]

At the time of the moon launch, Buzz Aldrin was serving as an elder of the Webster Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas. He met with his pastor to ask for suggestions of ways to do something meaningful when he landed on the moon. Aldrin and his pastor came up with the idea of taking communion on the moon.

When *Apollo 11* landed on the moon on July 20, 1969, Buzz Aldrin spoke these words over the open radio back to earth: “I would like to request a few moments of silence...and to invite each person listening in, wherever and whomever they may be, to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours, and to give thanks in his or her own way.” At this point radio communication went silent.

In the silence, Aldrin pulled out a communion wafer and a small vial of wine. He poured the wine into a cup and waited for it to settle into the cup. They were in the moon’s gravity, so it took longer than pouring liquid on earth. When the wine settled into the cup, Aldrin read these words from a hand written note card: “And Jesus said, ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.’”[2]

An interesting thing about this story is the fact that it was reported after the fact and mentioned in Buzz Aldrin’s two books. However, it was not known at the time. People on earth had no idea that Aldrin was reading a Bible verse and taking communion during the radio silence. Aldrin says this is because NASA and the U.S. government were already fighting lawsuits from famed atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair about other Bible verses read publicly from space.

Another interesting thing is the way Aldrin connected these words with the Lord’s Supper. There are some scholars who think that is what Jesus intended. After all, John 13 records the events of Jesus and his disciples eating the Last Supper in the upper room—and most scholars think that the words of John 15 were probably spoken after supper while reclining around the table.

I find it unlikely that this is a reference to the Lord’s Supper. Sure, we can make a connection between “I am the vine” and the “fruit of the vine.” But, what about the bread? Since there is no reference to the bread of the Lord’s Supper, I think Jesus has something else in mind.

Read John 15: 1 – 17.

Jesus is drawing on a common image. We all know what a vine looks like. We have seen grape vines and honeysuckle vines. Even with a limited knowledge of horticulture, we can understand what he is talking about. A vine is a form of a plant. It's a little more hearty than a blade of grass, but it is not quite as firm (or wooden) as a tree trunk. A vine doesn't have leaves on it, but it does have branches. The leaves and the fruit of the vine grow on the branches.

II. True Vine... John 15: 1 – 2... I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 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.

Notice that Jesus' first words are not "I am the vine." Rather, Jesus said, "I am the TRUE vine." If Jesus is the true vine, then it seems likely that Jesus is reminding his disciples about a false vine...Or perhaps an imitation vine.

Maybe Jesus is drawing on our common knowledge of creation. What we think of as a vine is ultimately an imitation of Jesus. Maybe Jesus wants us to think of the difference between heaven and earth. Earthly realities are only temporary and symbolize the eternal nature of God and heaven. (That doesn't really sound like Jesus. It actually sounds more like Plato.)

Instead, I think Jesus has another vine in mind. Like the vine we read about in **Psalm 80: 8 – 16**, **"Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, 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, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it. Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish."**

And the vine in **Jeremiah 2: 21**, **"I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?"**

In these Old Testament references, we see that the people of Israel were often referred to as a vine. Israel was no ordinary vine. They were a vine planted by God's own hand. They were God's own vine...God's own people. They had a special relationship with God by virtue of the fact that they were Israel.

When Jesus claimed to be the true vine, he has spoken a word of judgment against Israel. Israel is not the true vine. They are a false vine...an imitation vine...a wild vine that no longer serves the purposes of the gardener.

In other words, Jesus teaches us that it is possible to have a true relationship with God. However, that relationship is only possible through Jesus himself. Relationship with God is not based on race, religion or politics. Relationship with God is only possible to those who are connected to

Jesus—the true vine.

III. Remain in Jesus... John 15: 4... Remain in me, and I will 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.

In verse 4, Jesus gives us a command to “remain” in him. The Greek word translated “remain” is one of the first words Greek students learn when they study biblical Greek. The basic meaning of this word is “to remain” or “to abide.” This explains why the King James Version uses the word “abide” instead of “remain.”

“Abide” is probably a better choice than “remain.” “Remain” makes it sound like Jesus is challenging us to “stay saved,” as if it were possible to fall out of salvation. But, “abide” is just as difficult, because it is not a word we use very regularly. It’s difficult to understand what Jesus means.

To abide is to live. An abode is a home. Perhaps we can capture the meaning of Jesus’ words with something like, “make yourself at home”... You know there is a difference between living somewhere and “making yourself at home.”

IV. Bear Fruit.

Product...Result...Harvest. Fruit is not something that we produce. It is the natural, organic by product of a life connected to Jesus.

1. Life...John 15: 6...If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

Vital connection...It is the connection that leads to life. Branches that are not connected to the vine can do nothing but wither and die...Branch in the vine vs. Stick in the mud

2. Prayer...John 15: 7...If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Being connected to Jesus requires that our thoughts become conformed to Jesus’ thoughts...our desires the same as Jesus’ desires...Therefore, anything we desire is within God’s will

3. Obedience...John 15: 10...If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Jesus’ understanding of discipleship involves a total change in life. Jesus makes demands of our faith, but he also makes demands of our ethical behavior.

4. Joy...John 15: 11...I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

The human understanding of joy is really no different from happiness or pleasure. However, the Bible speaks of joy differently. The Bible says that we can find joy in the midst of trials and persecution. The Bible says we can find joy when the world around us is grieving. On one hand, joy can be the same thing as happiness—like all our Baylor folks felt Friday night and Saturday afternoon when both basketball teams made it into the Elite Eight. On the other hand, joy can simply be the way we perceive ourselves. In this case, joy does not depend on our circumstances or our basketball teams.

In this sense, joy has heavenly perspective.

5. Love...John 15: 12 – 13...My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus tells us two things about love. First, Jesus expects us to love each other. Second, Jesus explains how we are supposed to love each other.

Jesus does not qualify love by defining whom we are to love. We are to love each other. This seems to be a reference to the disciples loving other disciples. In our context, it refers to Christians loving Christians and church people loving church people. Jesus didn't tell us to love only the people we want to love. We don't get to choose. If someone is a disciple of Jesus, we are to love them. If someone is a member of the church, we are to love them.

The only qualification Jesus gave us is when he told us to love each other in the same way he first loved us. Jesus' love for us was not a warm fuzzy feeling. Jesus' love was an action. Jesus loved us by laying down his life on the cross. Jesus was not murdered or executed. Jesus did not die a tragic and untimely death. Jesus was in control of both his life and his death. He willingly and voluntarily gave his life for you and me. Now, Jesus asks us to do the same for each other.

Death is not the only way we can lay down our lives for others. Sometimes, laying down your life is nothing more than putting the needs of someone else ahead of your own needs. Sometimes, we love each other by delaying our own dreams and ambitions so that someone else can realize their dreams and ambitions.

Jesus defines love as self-sacrificial actions. Give your life for others.

6. Mission...John 15: 16...You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

V. Conclusion.

John the Elder in Ephesus... “Little children, Love one another...Little children, Love one another...Little children, Love one another...”

[1] <http://www.snopes.com/glurge/communion.asp>

[2]http://content.usatoday.com/_common/_scripts/big_picture.aspx?width=490&height=726&storyURL=/news/nation/2007-09-19-3188379411_x.htm&imageURL=http://images.usatoday.com/Wires2Web/20070919/3188379411_US_Astronaut_Auctionx-large.jpg
