

AHH LIFE!

REFLECTING ON JESUS' UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE

Water from Rock, November 21, 2017, Tim Smith

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

John 10:10

INTRODUCTION

In this series we reflect on Jesus' teaching about experiencing the life He came to give us. We will focus on what is customarily called "The Upper Room Discourse", or, Jesus' teaching in the Upper Room (and prayer afterwards) a few hours before He died. In John 13-17 Jesus describes how followers can now live in God's "eternal life", zoe aionios, ("life of the age to come").

TEXT: JOHN 14:30-15:5

1. Many Bible scholars suggest that at this point in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus and His disciples are headed towards the Mount of Olives to a garden where Jesus likes to pray. On their way they have perhaps paused at the entrance to the temple that at Passover is kept open all night for the many thousands of pilgrims to pray. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus says that at the temple entrance there was a magnificent golden grape vine "with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators." (Josephus, *Antiquities*) Elsewhere, Josephus says that from this golden grape vine "clusters of grapes hung as tall as a man's height." (Josephus, *The Jewish War*)
2. The grape vine was the national emblem of Israel and Old Testament writers frequently used the grape vine to symbolize Israel (Psalm 89:9-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Isaiah 27:2; Jeremiah 2:21; Jeremiah 12:10; Ezekiel 15:1-8; Ezekiel 17:1-21; Ezekiel 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1-2).
3. The grape vine was used to represent Jerusalem on coins made during the first Jewish revolt in A. D. 66-70.
4. Jesus often used the grapevine to symbolize the nation of Israel in his teaching (Matthew 20:1-16; Matthew 21:28-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 13:6-9; Luke 20:9-16).

A SONG OF THE LORD'S VINE: PSALM 80:8-19

- ⁸ *You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.*
- ⁹ *You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.*
- ¹⁰ *The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;*
- ¹¹ *it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the River.*
- ¹² *Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?*
- ¹³ *The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.*
- ¹⁴ *Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
the stock that your right hand planted.*
- ¹⁶ *They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.*
- ¹⁷ *But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.*
- ¹⁸ *Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.*
- ¹⁹ *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

1. The New Revised Standard Version tries to be gender neutral and unfortunately translates “son of man” in v. 17 as “the one”. The preferable translation “son of man” more clearly the Messiah Jesus.
2. Yahweh planted Israel as a vine in the land of Canaan but His vine did not produce fruit. Therefore, Yahweh judged the nation.

JESUS AS THE TRUE VINE: JOHN 15:1-5

1. The “Son of Man” at God’s right hand (Psalm 80:17) is Israel’s Messiah, Messiah Jesus is contrasted with unfruitful Israel.

2. Messiah Jesus takes up Israel's role in God's purpose and fulfills it. This is not a rejection of God's covenant people, rather their fulfillment in her Messiah. Theologian N. T. Wright summarizes Jesus' role in bringing Israel's role to a climax: "The living God comes into his world in the person of Israel's representative, to do for Israel and for the world what they could not do for themselves to be the meeting between the Creator and his creatures." (N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*)
3. "My Father is the vine-grower" -- The Father is the one who cares for the vine and its branches. This continues the theme in the Upper Room Discourse of Jesus' reliance upon the Father. Jesus is never portrayed in the Gospels as independent of the Father but always working together with Him.
4. The science of viticulture, or study of growing grapes, says "a struggling vine produces better wine than one that has better growing conditions." (Curtis J. Alley, "Propagation of Grapevines", *California Agriculture*, July 1980). "More modern methods of growing grapes, in close-spaced rows on wire trellising, take advantage of the fact that making the vines struggle generally results in better quality grapes. It's a bit like people... If you take a grapevine and make its physical requirements for water and nutrients easily accessible, then (somewhat counterintuitively) it will give you poor grapes." Jamie Goode, Wineanrok.com
5. Continuous reliance on the Jesus the Vine results in fruit. Notice the progression from "fruit" (v. 2) to "more fruit" (v. 2) to "much fruit" (v. 5). Abiding in Christ is essential to bearing fruit.
6. The phrase "in me" is used 16 times in John's Gospel, referring to a life of intimate oneness with Jesus. Branches share the very life of the Vine. The disciple's life and fruitfulness depend on union with the life of Christ. Jesus taught earlier about the mutual indwelling of believers with Him: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:20).
7. Jesus emphasizes the importance of abiding in Him as the word "abide" is used five times in these few verses alone. Jesus' first use of "abide" is in the imperative: "Abide in me..." He does not assume that disciples are abiding in Him, so He commands them to abide, to live in Him.
8. Bearing fruit is the natural outcome of abiding in Christ.

JOHN 14:30-15:5

³⁰*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me;* ³¹*but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.* ²*He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.* ³*You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.* ⁴*Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.* ⁵*I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*