

## **I Am (Part 7) – The True Vine**

Matt Chandler – March 20, 2016

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Hey, how are we? Doing okay? If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in John, chapter 15. This is Palm Sunday, so in the Christian calendar this begins Holy Week. This is when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. If you have a church background, grew up in church, probably when you were little, you either made a palm leaf or were handed a palm leaf in children's church, and you waved it. Maybe even you were part of a tradition that did that in what has been called historically "big church."

What we're celebrating is that this is the Sunday Christ would have made his entry into Jerusalem, knowing he was going to die, knowing he was going to be betrayed. If we looked at the whole of the calendar, you would have a season of Lent, where you have denied yourself something to begin to prepare your heart for this week, and then Palm Sunday would be the beginning of Holy Week, and then you'd have your Good Friday service that would end your Lenten laydowns, whatever they were. Then, from there, you would celebrate the risen Christ.

All of that was built so you wouldn't get swept away in the busyness of life here and could root yourself in a type of remembrance that should change how you interact with the world around you. This is Palm Sunday for us, so we're going to spend our time in John, chapter 15. What we've been doing for the last seven weeks has been walking through the seven "I am" statements of Jesus in the gospel of John.

We said it's one thing to understand what Jesus does, but it's another thing to understand who he is. Our confidence in what he does is rooted in who he is, because if he's not who he says he is, then what he says he has accomplished for us doesn't matter. All we've done has not really gone, "Okay, here's what he does," but we've really focused on, "This is who Jesus says he is." There are seven of those "I am" statements in the gospel of John.

Last weekend when we got together we talked about, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father except through me." We talked about the fact that Jesus is the way home. You only get home through Jesus. If you weren't here, again, all our stuff is always online for free, and you can check that out. What we're going to camp out in this weekend is "I am the true vine." That's what Jesus is going to say in John 15.

Then next weekend for Easter we'll be in "I am the resurrection and the life." Just so you can get in your mind the context of when Jesus is teaching this, we're probably less than 24 hours away from Jesus being arrested at this point. He's saying these things knowing it's not long until he is arrested and slaughtered. With that said, let's look at John 15. I'm going to start in verse 1. We're going to read 11 verses, and then we'll just hang out a little bit and chat.

**"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. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."**

There's some imagery in here that probably doesn't strike us like it would strike some Jew in the first century. If I could unpack this pretty quickly for you... When Jesus says, "I am the true vine," that is loaded with meaning. Throughout the Old Testament, that imagery of the vine is used toward God's people. In the Old Testament, if you came across this imagery of someone or something being

the vine, that was always Israel or the people of God, and yet every time it's used in the Old Testament it's used negatively.

In the Old Testament, when Israel was the vine, it was always accompanied with a declaration that they were a vine that did not bear fruit and, therefore, the wrath of God was coming. When you heard *vine* terminology in the first century if you were a Jew, it was almost always a pronouncement of judgment, yet Jesus here is turning that on its head. He says, "I am the true vine." In short, he's saying, "I am doing what you cannot do, and I am being what you have not been able to be."

This is nothing short of a gospel declaration from Jesus. He's entering into this banner of failure over their lives, and he's saying, "I've got this." That's what just happened when Jesus said, "I am the true vine. You have not been able to be fruitful in a way that pleases God, but I've got you. I am the true vine." He's rescuing this imagery of judgment, this imagery of failure, this imagery of no matter how hard they worked, no matter how hard they tried, they always fell short.

He's stepping into that mess that you and I are just as prone today to feel as they were to feel in the first century, and as hard as it is for *us* to believe, it was hard for *them* to believe that what Jesus is saying here is true. He's saying, "No, I've got you. I'm the true vine. You're not the true vine. The type of fruitfulness that pleases the Lord that you have been unable to walk in I will now make possible for you."

That's what's happening in this simple statement, "I am the vine." That's what's happening in this imagery. I could spend a long time there, but what I'd rather do is keep digging in the text and tell you what that means. That imagery is kind of nice. "Oh, great. Jesus is going to be the true vine." Here's what that means. There are three things in particular I think that means.

The first is that since Jesus is the Vine, since Jesus is what we cannot be... As much as we strive, as much as we work, as hard as we try to be moral and upright and be good people, we're going to fall short of that over and over and over again, and that's all of our life stories. Now he's saying since Jesus is the *true* vine, since Jesus is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves, you can expect pruning. Didn't see *that* one coming, did you? You're like, "Oh, that's great. What's next then? Do we sing? Do we skip? What happens?" You get pruned.

If Jesus is the true vine, if he has done what we could not do for ourselves, Jesus said, "Expect to be pruned." I'm just going to lay my two cents down. I wish something else was there, like "Be blessed." Here in a second you'll see that being pruned *is* to be blessed. We don't have a lot of categories for that, but it's true. So expect pruning. Our position is now in his presence. Then lastly, Jesus being the true vine gives us the power to love, and that power to love is going to be, I hope, a really profound moment for us.

Let's look back at the text. Expect pruning. Jesus is the Vine. He is what we could not be, so expect to be pruned. Look at verse 2: **"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."** Quick hard conversation. If you're a guest, you might not trust me enough for me to say this to you, but I'm just going to say it and let the Lord handle me in time.

To be a Christian is to bear fruit. If there is no fruit, there is no genuine belief. How you define that fruit starts to matter. If you define that fruit in external moral religious ways, you're no better than the Pharisees, because that's not how Jesus defines fruit. He's saying here if you don't bear any fruit at all, you get cut off. Then what about those goody ones of us who *do* bear fruit? You get cut back.

Why would the Lord prune what's fruitful? Well, he says. So we would bear more fruit. So bear more of what? What does it mean to be fruitful? Does it mean we're all going to have awesome careers and we're never going to get sick and everybody is going to love us? Is that the kind of fruit we can expect as Christians? Well, no. He's going to say it like this in Galatians 5:22-23.

**"But the fruit of the Spirit..."** Notice in this text that's not the *fruits* of the Spirit. That's not plural; it's singular. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."** Jesus says because he is what we could not be he is pruning us so we can grow in these areas.

The reason this is singular and not plural is because if you tease any one of these out and make it singular, it reveals that it's a counterfeit fruit. It's like a fruit that's stapled to a tree in the hopes that it would grow more fruit rather than it is legitimate fruitfulness. If you lack patience, you're probably not loving. If you just took this and tried to tease one out, you would see they all fall apart if they're not growing.

If you lack love, you probably aren't walking in any real joy. If you lack joy, you're probably lacking in kindness. If you lack kindness, you probably aren't walking in a lot of goodness. If you lack goodness, you're probably not faithful. If you lack faithfulness, you're probably not gentle. This is a fruit that grows symmetrically over time.

There wasn't anybody in the room who when I read Galatians 5 went, "Nailing it! You don't have to say anything else. I've been encouraged, brother. I'm out." That's not where we find ourselves. All of us, every one in this room, pastor included, is not where I once was but not where I ultimately will be or even *want* to be in the growth of the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, the Lord in his kindness prunes so that I might grow in these areas.

Somewhere along the way... I've really tried to research and figure out where it happened. It's such an accumulation of foolishness. We began to believe that to follow the Lord is some sort of Spirit sprinkle, no room for difficulty or suffering or hardship or doubt. Somewhere along the way we started thinking in terms of a singular moment as opposed to a lifelong journey where we wrestle with doubt and cling to the cross and really one foot by faith in front of the next our whole lives.

This idea of utopia on earth is absurd. It's nowhere in the Bible. The Lord prunes, and we grow. The Lord prunes, and we grow. The Lord prunes, and we grow. The Lord prunes, and we grow. Jesus says, "I am what you could not be, but I am going to grow you in who I am. And who am I? I am perfect love. I am perfect joy. I am perfect peace. I am perfect kindness. I am perfect goodness. I am perfect faithfulness. I am perfect gentleness, and I have perfect self-control. I'm going to grow you in these areas. How? I'm going to prune you so you can grow more."

It's actually encouraging, because he's going, "You have some of this fruit. Now I'm going to prune it back so you can have even more of it." The reason he's saying here, "Against such things there is no law," is nobody is going to go, "No, that's not right. I don't want to increase in love. Are you kidding me? I don't want to increase in goodness."

I'll speak personally for you. In all my efforts to grow in this, the two largest moments of growth in my own life was the difficulty in my marriage the first seven years and brain cancer. I found those two seasons of my life wrought about the greatest strides in this increase. Let me lay before you that I'd rather not go through either one of those things ever again. Even as I could say God really grew me in that season, I'm not willing to say, "I'd like another round."

Here's what I want to help you with. If you're in a season right now where you feel this pruning, you feel like you're being cut back, you're in a heightened season of wrestling with doubt or struggling in this situation of relational conflict or a lot of fear and anxiety, that doesn't mean you've done anything wrong. It doesn't mean you're being punished or that you haven't quite dialed in your discipline enough to have a happy-clappy Christian life. Again, we have to get rid of this notion. It's absurd. We will be pruned.

Our position is in his presence. This is a scandalous text. Look back in verse 3. I can't even believe this is in the Bible. **"Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you."** What? He says, "You're going to be pruned if you don't bear fruit. If you're not a believer, you're going to be cut off, but if you *are* a believer and you *are* bearing fruit, I'm going to help you bear more fruit by pruning you back."

Then he says to his disciples, "But you are clean, and you're clean because you've believed my word. I have spoken to you, and you believed what I said to you about who I am." Jesus has said, "Here's who I am." We've already covered these statements. "I am. I am. I am. I am the Son of God. I am the light. I am the way, the truth, and the life." He has taught, "I am the Messiah. I'm the only one who can save you from your sins," and they have believed.

Because they believed, not because they did anything... In fact, keep in your mind that these fools are 24 hours away from betraying and denying Christ outright. Gosh, you ought to learn to be more gracious to yourself, Christian. They're 24 hours away from with curse-filled lips saying, "I do not know this man. I don't know him." Yet Jesus says, "You're clean because you believed in my word." This is where I'm saying our position really is in his presence because of who he is not because of who we are. Look now in verse 4.

**"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."**

One of the great supernatural mysteries of what it means to be a Christian is around this idea of union with Christ, that I am in him and he is in me. That works in a couple of different ways. Mainly

that works in how God sees us. If you're a Christian, when God sees you he sees the perfect obedience of Christ. Not your failures but the obedience of Christ, which was perfect. There's also this union with Christ that's celebrated in Communion. It's celebrated at baptism and celebrated in the proclamation of the gospel. It actually infers to this intimacy we have with Christ, that we are welcomed and delighted in.

That's so hard for us to believe, and here's why. For years, before I became the pastor of this church, I primarily did college and singles ministries. Here's what I saw over and over again in both college and singles ministries. People would get together. They would start to date. They loved the Lord. While they were worshipping, they saw the holiness on a brother or sister across the room and said, "I like the holiness on them," and then they began to pursue them.

Then they would start to date. It was really sweet to watch. They would sit by each other during worship. We'd go on trips. They'd want to sit by each other on the bus. Then the inevitable breakup would come. What you would see when the breakup would come is this desire to avoid the other. At the church I was at in Abilene we had multiple services, so here's what that would look like.

All of a sudden, where the two used to sit with one another right up front or right to the left or something like that, now all of a sudden one was in the 9:00 and one was in the 11:00 or one came on Saturday night and one came on Sunday night. They just sought to avoid one another, because when you believe you have offended, you tend to avoid.

I can tell you when I pull into my driveway whether or not my kids have done really well with their mom or have not done really well. If I pull into our driveway and they're like, "Dad!" and they run out and I get to pick them up and go, "What's up?" I know things have probably gone pretty well today. If only one of them comes out, I know probably something happened. Mom probably snapped and said the dreaded, "Wait till your father gets home," so now there is no delight. There is avoidance.

There is my son or my daughter with their door closed in their room, probably layering up on drawers like we used to do as kids, going, "Is he going to spank me? Is he not? What's going to happen here?" It's human nature that if we believe we have offended, we avoid. I think what's so stunning about what's happening here is Jesus is saying, "If you abide in me, I abide in you," and we're welcomed and delighted in because of Christ. There's no reason to avoid God.

I can't tell you how often and how normal it is for people to think they have to clean themselves up before they can approach the Lord. The Bible doesn't play it out like that. He doesn't ask you to clean yourself up to come. He asks you to come so he can clean you up. I'm just telling if you could ever really grasp... Well, let me do this. Here's a perfect picture of what it looks like to really understand the love of God for you in Christ.

The Bible tells us Peter is a real brazen, aggressive brother. Most of us would probably like him. On the night Jesus is arrested, he takes them out to the garden and says, "Hey, listen. You guys are all going to betray me. You're all going to leave. It's literally a matter of hours." He probably didn't look at his watch, but he's just saying, "In a matter of hours, you guys are all going to betray me," and Peter literally looks at Jesus and says, "Even if they all fall, I would never betray you."

Jesus talks straight to him. He's like, "Actually, Peter, by the time the alarm goes off tomorrow morning, you're going to betray me with curse words three times." So Peter doubles down. That's why I love this guy. He's going to argue with Jesus after he has said, "You're the Son of God," after he has seen him raise the dead and calm storms. He has seen Jesus do all this stuff, and then he says, "Even if I must die, I would never betray you."

Jesus is like, "All right, Peter. All right, bro." Then they go, and what happens? To give Peter credit, when they come to arrest Jesus, Peter is ready to roll. He pulls out the sword and cuts off a dude's ear, which means he's not only weak-minded but not good with a sword. How do you even just get a guy's ear? I mean, wouldn't you get his shoulder or something too? Not Peter. Just his ear. I don't know if the guy went like *that* and it was a slice, but he just gets his ear.

Jesus tells Peter, "Put away your sword. He who lives by the sword dies by the sword," and then picks up the dude's ear and puts it back on his head. At that point, all of the disciples scatter. We know and most scholars believe there's one who kind of hangs around in the shadows until one of the guards finds him and grabs him. When he grabs him, that guy is so freaked out (most scholars believe it's Peter) he literally sheds his clothes and leaves the temple guards holding his clothes and runs away naked.

Then the Bible tells us that in an inner court where Jesus is being tried, Peter comes in and sits down among the crowd. He's kind of "camoed" up now. He doesn't want to be recognized. A servant girl says to him, "Aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" Keep in mind Jesus is right here in this courtyard. Peter says, "I don't know what you're talking about. I do not know that man."



He thinks he solved it. She goes away and keeps serving drinks or whatever. Then she comes back around. She goes, "No, I hear your accent. You're from Galilee. Surely you're one of his disciples." This time Peter is a little bit more agitated. He says, "I don't know this man." He gets a little bit more bold. She goes away, and then she comes back around. "No, I've seen you with him. I know you're one of..." He goes off. The Bible is clear that he begins to cuss her out.

He says, "I do not know this man!" Upon his loud curse-filled expression of "I don't know this man. I want nothing to do with this man," the Bible says the rooster crows, which was the alarm clock Jesus referenced, and Jesus turns and looks at Peter. Peter looks at Jesus, and Peter's heart breaks, and he flees from the courtyard. It doesn't get worse, I don't think, at betrayal levels, if there *are* levels, for you to with curses on your tongue denounce Jesus in his darkest hour.

Fast-forward post resurrection. The Bible says the disciples went back to all they knew. They went back to their old jobs. They're fishing. Peter was a fisherman. These are some blue-collar brothers. They're out there fishing again, and somebody sees Jesus on the shore, walking. They had heard he had been raised. Now they see Jesus, and what does Peter do seeing Jesus on the shore?

Does he hide under the boat and go, "Oh my gosh! There he is. I can't believe it. Last time I saw him I was cussing his name and said I don't know who he is." Did he hide? No, the Bible says he literally kind of tied his waistcoat, dove into the sea, swam to the shore, and ran and fell at the feet of Christ. To understand our position in the presence of God is to understand that in Christ we don't have to avoid but can run *to* regardless of what we're guilty of.

That's stunning right there. Peter didn't hide but dove into the ocean and swam toward him. Goodness! They were trying to turn the boat around to all get there, but Peter, who was most guilty, was the one who jumped into the water and didn't wait for the boat to get to the shore. Guys, this is unbelievable. When you truly understand what we're celebrating this week, you run *to* him; you don't run *from* him.

Peter, who looked at Christ in his eyes and said, "I do not know this blankety-blank man," who betrayed him most passionately despite his brazen claims of being better than the rest of them... "Even if they might all betray you, I will never." He's throwing those other dudes under the bus. "Even if these other 10 sell you out, I'm not." "Well, you're going to." "No, even if I must die I won't."

Two hours later... Even if you made New Year's resolutions, you made it a couple of days, right? You at least made it to January 6 before you failed. Peter doesn't make it a couple of hours. "Even if I must die, I won't betray you." Jesus is like, "Okay, it's 2:00 in the morning now. I'm going to give you... Gosh, the rooster will crow for a third time around 6:30. I'm going to give you till 6:30 a.m." Sure enough, even as Jesus spoke over Peter, "These things will happen," he could not.

It's the most guilty, when they understand what Jesus is saying when he says, "I am the true vine; I will do what you cannot; I will be what you cannot," who run *to* him and not *from* him. That leads us into verses 8-10, which I called the *power to love*. We've seen here that if Christ is the true vine, then we can expect to be pruned, because God is serious about growing us into the image of Christ, and that our position is in the presence of God now, because Jesus is the true vine. Lastly, in Christ, in this position, we're given the power to love. I'll show you why this is so important. In verse 8 it says:

**"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."**

There's a cycle of dependence occurring here that I think is stunning, and I think because we don't quite understand, don't fully embrace, can't hardly figure out what's really going on in our position in the presence of God because of Christ, we read this text all wrong. We begin to read this text and say, "Okay, I see that if I obey his commands, then I abide in his love." That's not what he just said. He says, "If you abide in my love, then you'll obey my commands."

It's not, "Obey my commands and you'll love me," but "As you grow in your love for me you'll obey my commands." When you get this backward, you totally enslave yourselves and step outside of the orthodox Christian faith. Orthodox Christian faith is not, "Do so you might be approved." It's "Love so therefore you'll do." Gosh, if you're married in here, you understand how this works.

I'm going to have lunch with my parents tomorrow. I love my folks, but my mom was somewhat enabling. What I mean by that is she just did stuff for me where she probably should have made me. It did not prepare me well for marriage. I could take a shower, dry off, throw the towel on the ground, and just go on about life. Mom would pick up the towel, wash the towel, fold the towel, and put the towel back up.

When I got married, Lauren would ask questions like this. She'd go, "Hey, honey, can you come here?" I would come into the bathroom, and she would go, "What's that?" Now, guys, if you're newly married, that's a trap. She's not asking literally what that is like she doesn't know that's a towel. Lauren would go, "Hey, what's that?" I'm an idiot. I'm like, "A towel." She's like, "No, I know that's a towel, sweetie. Why is the towel on the ground?" "What do you mean?" You're like, "Surely you're not that dumb." I'm telling you I was that dumb.

Lauren was like, "No, this is what we do. When we're done with our towel, we hang it on this hook, and then if we've used it a couple of times, we're going to put it in this basket. This basket is called a hamper. You're going to put your stuff inside. That chair is not a hamper. This thing I've put at the bottom of our bed is for the 62 pillows I put on our bed, not for your clothes." (That was a bit passive-aggressive. I understand that. She's not going to hear this sermon this weekend, I don't believe, so I feel safe. I'm hoping she won't podcast.)

In the middle of all that, this is how I'm trained. Now over the years... I can tell. I wish she would do this. I hang up my towel every time now. Let me describe the process. I don't get out of the shower and dry off and go, "You know what? I don't really feel in love with Lauren right now. To be honest with you, she has been a bit stressed out lately, which then in turn stresses me out. Gosh, you know what will jump-start my love for her? If I hang up this towel. Oh, there it is. I'm just crazy in love with Lauren now."

That's not how it works. It's actually my love for her that drives that simple activity of hanging up the towel or putting my clothes in the hamper. Hear me. It was imperfectly executed for a long time, and I might have grown in *those* areas, but I have a slew of other things she has been asking me to do for our 18 years together, and I'm still like, "What is it? It's my coffee cup. Just tell me what to do. Will you just tell me what to do?" "Well, I want you to want to do it." "Well, I don't, so just help me help us. Just make it simple. Give me a coloring book of a guy carrying his cup to the kitchen, and I'll be able to do that."

What we see happening in this power to love, what we see happening in this back part, these last couple of verses, is that what I'm called to is to work on and grow in my love for Jesus Christ. That in turn will affect my obedience. Not to work on my obedience in order to love but grow in my love so it will straighten out my disobedience. So what does that mean? Well, I'll unpack. Again, this is historic stuff for us. If you're a Villager, this stuff should be top of mind.

I think what this means for Christians is that we want to fill our lives with things that stir our affections for Jesus. That's bottom line. I want to fill my life with stuff that stirs up my affections for Jesus. Simultaneously, I want to cut out of my life anything that robs me of those affections, because if I'm first called to love Jesus, and then in loving Christ if that straightens the crooked paths, then the best way to spend my energy, my time, and my efforts is not trying *not* to do bad things but rather giving myself over to a growing love for Jesus Christ.

I think a good right exercise for you would be to spend time paying attention to what stirs your affections for Jesus and what robs you of that affection so that you would have a working knowledge of how God has wired you. What I'm convinced of is for all of us that involves the Word of God and prayer. Then outside of that, we're all over the map.

I really like early mornings. I know tons of people are like, "Nuh-uh. That's Devil time. That doesn't stir my affection for the Lord. Do you know what stirs my affections? One in the afternoon." To be honest, some people are night people. They just really love the night. I do not love the night. I want to be in my second round of REM by about 9:30. That's my desire.

I rarely, if ever, get that, but in a perfect world, I'm having an awesome dream at 9:30, which means I'm deep in, and then I'll get up at 5:30 or 6:00, and we'll be quiet, and it'll just be me. So early mornings stir my affections for Jesus Christ. Isn't that weird? I can't point you to the Bible. "You'd better get up at 6:00." I can't, but I can tell you how I'm wired. Everything about my mindset and my heart-set is right if I get up before the kids and before anybody else and lay my day before the Lord and say, "Help me be aware of you." That stirs my affections for Jesus.

My closest friends stir my affections for Jesus. Not all of my friends, but my closest friends stir my affections for Jesus. Epic stories and narratives stir my affections for Jesus. Good music stirs my affections for Jesus. Then there are certain things that rob me of my affections for Jesus. I've said this over and over. I can't watch too much TV. I don't think TV is the demon box, and if you watch a lot of TV you're going to do meth and kill your parents.

I don't think that's true, but I *will* tell you that if I watch too much of it, I become really numb to dark things. I begin to be amused by what breaks the heart of God, and I don't want to put myself in that position. I lose empathy. I lose compassion, so I want to be careful about what I watch for entertainment. I can't, as silly as this sounds, follow sports too closely, because I start to really care

in an unhealthy way. Maybe you can care in a way that's healthy. I simply can't, so I need to stay at a distance.

I love sports, and that's why I have to watch it. I can all of a sudden out of nowhere be emotionally affected by what a boy does with a ball. Surely that can't be right. For me to have my day ruined because a 22-year-old dropped a ball or because a guy hit a half-court shot? (Too soon? I apologize. I shouldn't have done that. Don't clap. I won't do that in the other services. Well, I guess I will.) I have to just be careful. It's not that I don't watch. It's that I pay attention to my heart. Do I care too much? Am I getting sucked in too deep?

To work on growing my capacity to love the Lord empowers and fuels my obedience. It's the power to love that being positioned in his presence kind of fuels and drives our obedience and our transformation to look more and more like Jesus Christ, and all of that hinges on Jesus being what we could not be, becoming what we could not become, and accomplishing what we could not accomplish. If you're here and you're like, "Man, I am exhausted trying to be more and do better and do the right thing; gosh, I don't even know what the right thing is," let me lay this before you.

Christ has become what you cannot become. Christ has done what you will never be able to do. I'm looking around the room. We're all sorts of ages here, but I'm just telling you I don't care how old you grow to be. You're never going to get really, really good at being righteous. I say this all the time. Your best righteousness is that you're not someone else. "I'm not this guy at work I know." This is no righteousness at all. That's that you're a little bit better of a moron than your moron friend. That's not a win. It's definitely not a win before the holiness of God.

Now let me tell you why all this matters, and then I'm going to conclude. Look at verse 11. What's at stake in all of this that I'm talking about? "**These things I have spoken to you...**" This is why Jesus is teaching this. "**...that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.**" I've contended, I've argued for 13 years with you now that *joy* and *happiness* are not the same things and that one is worthy of pursuit and one is not.

*Happiness* is frail and fragile and can be affected by all of our external circumstances and situations. You know this. You've felt this. You've woken up one day happy. You're playing the radio loud and you have your windows down, and for whatever reason you feel happy. Then one person is in the left lane going 50. One person said something on your wall. You just saw that one person out and

about, and happiness is gone. It broke. It shattered in your hands, and you have no idea what even happened. Happiness is built on external circumstances.

*Joy* is different than happiness. It's built not on external circumstances but on ultimate spiritual realities, that I belong to Jesus and he belongs to me and that I am positioned in his presence and he is what I will never be, and I get to melt into that and rest into that. I don't ever feel like I'm going to be outed by somebody. If somebody points out a sin in my life, I can usually think, "Phew, that's all they know about," and rest in Christ's finished work in my life and in yours.

Why these things matter is the God of the universe is serious about your joy, your deep-rooted, deep-seated confidence that he has you, that he's for you, and that he will make a way. Here we are at the beginning of Holy Week with all of our chips pushed in toward Christ has done for me what I could never do for myself, and there's no safer place to rest. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women as always, just the opportunity to open up your Word, that you would speak to us, that you would want to direct and guide us, that you would not leave us to our own imaginations or our own devices but that you would lead and guide us, that even in this text you would remind us that you have done for us what we could not do for ourselves, that you are the true vine. We are not the true vine.

Real life, real fruitfulness will not come from *our* efforts but come from abiding and being with you, and you have made a way for that in your life, death, and resurrection. So I pray where we're skeptical about this that you would convince us, that you would seer into our minds the image of Peter the apostle, the disciple, jumping out of the boat and with all of his energy swimming toward you.

Where we have avoided you and have a long list of reasons why you would reject us and so we reject you because we think you will reject us, Holy Spirit of God, I pray you would overcome those objections and that whether it's addiction or lust or whatever it is, that in looking in your eyes and with curses spewing from his mouth Peter screaming that he did not know you despite his brazen confidence just hours earlier, that you would in a very real way convince us to come to you, that you are safe, that you are kind, that you are gracious, that you are merciful. We thank you that you cover all of our sins, Jesus, the good and true vine. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.