

The Gospel of John – The Seven “I am” sayings Session 7

John 15:1 “I am the true vine.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine you are the branches.”

Chapter 15 is in the Farewell Discourse. All Jesus, all the time! If you have been reading the chapters that make up this section 14-17 or some like to include chapter 13, you will notice more and more Jesus speaking.

I have always liked John’s Gospel because of the long conversations recorded in it. This is not a conversation, but a long monologue on everything Jesus thinks the disciples need to know before he leaves them. You will notice a lot of what is in Chapter 15 and 16 has already been said in chapter 14.

The Vine imagery - This I am saying takes us back to the Old Testament in Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah where the vine is well known as a symbol for Israel.

Isaiah 5:7, “The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the House of Israel.”

Psalms 80:8, “You brought a vine out of Egypt, you drove out the nations and planted it.”

Jeremiah 2:21, “I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock.”

In contrast to this image in John 15 Jesus is the vine. The true vine, of which the Father takes especially good care, pruning, trimming. The dead are cut off, pruned. The fruit is the gems of Jesus’ teachings given to his disciples.

Besides the vine imagery Jesus uses two other key words: “abide” and “love”. Abide or live, is used 11 times in these few verses. Love, in verses 9-17 is an essential ingredient to the disciples’ relationship to Jesus. Apart from him nothing will happen.

The last phrase of 15:5, “for apart from me you can do nothing.” reminds me of the saying, “You are either with me or against me.” Jesus is telling his listeners the options, with me, fruitful and abundant life. Without me, withered rejected branches thrown in the fire to be burned. Take your pick!

Just as God in the Old Testament delivered his people to freedom in a land where they would have abundant life if they followed his commandments, Jesus is now the embodiment of that freedom as he will free us from sins if we follow his commandments. There is no trek across wilderness, just the wilderness of our empty lives being filled with the fruit of Jesus’ love.

As we finish up this Bible study on the seven “I am” sayings I want to give you a short list bibliography of my sources:

“The Gospel According the John and the Johannine Epistles”. Collegeville Bible Commentary, Neal Flanagan, Liturgical Press, MN
Dr. Flanagan was one of my Bible Teachers at Seminary. Although he was a Franciscan brother, he taught this Lutheran very well indeed!

Christology of St. John: the Fourth Gospel, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, India

“Analysis of the Gospel of John in light of Christology”, Master’s Thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2008 Phaniel O. Osweto Ph.D.

Various papers from websites that came up on googling the Gospel of John. A lot of interesting reading that didn’t make into this class!