

# God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

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## **On the Way to the Garden (15:1-17:26)**

### **Second Farewell Discourse (15:1-16:33)**

#### **Monologue: I Am the Vine (15:1-8)**

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

The first of the farewell discourses occurred in the upper room at the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples (13:31-14:31). We now move to the second discourse that takes place in route to the garden called Gethsemane. This second discourse is found in chapters 15 and 16. It has five distinct themes: the vine and branches (15:1-8), his love for the disciples

and their love for one another (15:9-17), the promise of the Spirit of God (15:18-16:15), his warning that soon they will see him no more, followed by a promise they will see him again (16:16-28), and the reaction of the eleven (16:29-33).

An analogy is an attempt to teach something unknown by laying it along side something known so that the one may be compared to the other. Such analogies are given different names in biblical hermeneutics: parables, similitudes, allegories, etc. The common Hebrew word for this is *mashal*, which is the word for everything from a parable/story to a proverb or simple illustration. Its basic meaning is "to compare" (i.e., an illustration). This is what Jesus does in most of his analogies; and most of his analogies are drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures or themes common to Jewish life. The theme of the vine (grapevine) or vineyard is drawn from both the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish life.

The theme of Israel as God's vine is common to the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Psalms 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezek 15:1-8; 19:10ff; Hosea 10:1). It is curious to note how often Israel is spoken of as a vine that has become diseased, or is growing wild (a way of speaking of Israel's apostasy).

A significant point of note here is that Jesus calls himself "the true vine" (15:1). Before, Israel (the cooperate body/nation) was the vine (vineyard of God), a vine God himself, as Lord of the vineyard, had planted (Psalms 80:8ff). Each individual Jew was a branch of the vine (i.e., a member of the Jewish nation), and each individual Jew (branch) was to bear fruit in his/her life. The fruit they were to bear were the by-products of their faith: their religious life, their moral character, the good they did, etc. To be a branch in the vine of Israel was to have access to the life-giving presence and power of God.

Israel, however, had become a blighted vine. Its claims to being God's vineyard were false. They had become a wild vine bearing bad fruit. What Jesus is saying to his disciples is that he is the true vine. To be "in him," not "in Israel," is the means of access to the life-giving presence and power of God. If he is the true vine, then those in him are true branches; and true branches must bear fruit. A similar idea is involved in the relationship Israel once bore to God as his son (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1; Psalms 82:6). But Jesus is the true Son of God, not Israel. It is not Israel as the cooperate

offspring (sons and daughters) of God, but Jesus as the true offspring or Son of God; and to be one with Jesus is to share his sonship with the Father.

What is the fruit they are to bear? To carry out the analogy Jesus has chosen here, the fruit of vine-branches would be "the grapes." Jesus frequently referred to fruit in his teachings. In every instance the fruit is the product the plant produces, not the reproduction of the plant itself (cf. Matt 7:16-20; 12:33; 13:18-23; 21:18-20, and 33-41). The fruit these disciples were to bear in their lives were, as with Israel of old, the by-products of their life of faith. The fruit these disciples were to produce in their lives, as is evidenced throughout this discourse material, both explicitly and implicitly, is love, obedience, joy, peace, patience with one another, kindness toward one another, goodness in their lives and in their treatment of one another, faithfulness, unselfishness, etc. The use of the theme of fruit in other writings of the NT is the same (cf. Rom 7:4-5; Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9ff; Col 1:1-14; James 3:17-18).

Although bearing fruit may be used to refer to "the making of disciples" (e.g., Rom 1:13), that is not what Jesus is speaking of here in John 15. He tells them that they are to "bear fruit" as do branches, not "make more branches" (i.e., make more disciples). The interpretation of this text as "a command to evangelize" is very common. Such an interpretation, however, is not exegetically sound, nor is it a correct application of what Jesus is saying and it misses a more significant lesson. What Jesus does teach here provides us with a far more effective model for leading people to faith. The Christian in whom the reign of God has produced such fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, unselfishness and etc. will influence the world for Christ far more than those who arm themselves with a battery of polemic argumentation and go out to "make disciples" through confrontation. More disciples are made by the epistles they experience through association with a believer than those they read, to use Paul's analogy of 2 Cor 3:1-6.

**Monologue: Greater Love Has No Man than This  
(15:9-17)**

*As (kathos – just as, in the same manner as) the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so*

*that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup>I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other.*

The "new commandment" Jesus gives his disciples in 13:34-35 is given here again. There he told them that they were to love one another as he had loved them (i.e., in a completely unselfish way). This love would characterize them as his disciples (v 35). Here Jesus gives further interpretation to the meaning of love (*agape*). "As the Father has loved me, so (*kathos* - in this manner), I have loved you." His love for them is the same as God's love for him; it is divine love in the fullest sense of the word (15:9). His love for the Father expresses itself in obedience to the Father; just as their love for him will express itself in obedience to him. Because of his obedience to the Father, he dwells in the Father's love; likewise, if they are obedient to him, they will dwell in his love (vv 10-11).

Then in 15:12 he repeats the "new commandment" again, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." They are not to love one another as they love themselves (Mark 12:31), they are to love one another more than they love themselves. This is a revolutionary idea to say the least; and an idea as desperately needed today as in the time of Jesus. Perhaps, more so in our society, which sociologists have labeled, the "Narcissistic Society" or the "Me Generation." It can hardly be denied that "selfishness" has become epidemic in our world; perhaps it has always been so. In any event, Jesus' words here hit at the heart of our problem - "self-love" (i.e., our self-centeredness, self-concern out of control, in a word - selfishness).

"Greater love has no man than this," continues Jesus, "that a man lay down his life for his friends" (v 13). It is hard to escape the implication of these words. "Love one another as I have loved you," he says. How has he loved them? So much that he would lay down his life for them. In a few hours he will do precisely that. It is clear that he was in complete control of

his death, he laid down his life, no one took it from him. This is a very important point in terms of the interpretation of his death as a sacrifice. He was not a victim-sacrifice slaughtered as a sin-offering in the ritual of the temple cultus. Jesus' sacrifice would more likely have been understood by his disciples as a self-sacrifice in the tradition of the Jewish "martyr sacrifice" of the Maccabees in the Syrian rebellion. Jesus died not to appease a wrath-filled deity but to eliminate the power of sin as an enslaving force over the people of God.

John consistently portrays Jesus' interpretation of his death as a cosmic conflict with the Satanic powers, an event from which he would emerge in glory. Paul also interprets Jesus' death this way. In 1 Cor 15:22 he writes, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." All members of the human race are "in Adam," and all whose existence is one with Adam ends in death. All, however, who are "in Christ," whose existence is one with Christ, participate in the victory of Christ over death. Is this not what Jesus repeatedly taught these disciples throughout this Gospel? Cf. John 5:21, 24-29, 39-40; 8:23-24, 51; 11:25-26; 12:23-25, 31-32; 13:36; 14:1-6, 28-30; 16:33; 17:1-5.

The satanic power that consigns man to death is sin. John the Baptist identified Jesus as, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." How does he take away the sin of the world, by destroying the power of sin over the world? In his death he shared with us the fullness of human / adamic existence, death being the conclusion of adamic existence. In his resurrection, however, he arose into new existence, not back into his old existence in Adam.

By means of his resurrection he brought a new realm of existence into being, an existence over which sin and death have no power, an existence characterized by the power of grace, rather than an existence characterized by the power of sin. In Christ we participate in this new existence now, at death we will enter fully into it, having put off our old human existence (our adamic bodies). Then in the resurrection we will receive "spiritual bodies" and we will be like Jesus (1 John 3:2; 1 Cor 15:35-50). Then death will be swallowed up in victory for us in our resurrection, just as death and the Satanic realm have already been conquered by the resurrection of Christ (cf., 1 Cor 15:20-26, 51-57; Heb 2:14-15; Rev 1:17-18; see also: 1 John 3:2, 14-16). Jesus sacrificed his existence in order to bring about a new existence for us (Phil 2:5-11). Greater love (*agape* - totally unselfish love) has no man

than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends (*philos* - one loved/a friend).

“But I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last,” says Jesus (v 16). Here the “fruit” terminology is again used. What is the meaning of this statement? The fruit they will bear is that which would be produced by them for those who be change by the fulfillment of their mission. Through them would come to others the gift of the “fruit that will last.” The gift of eternal life is the greatest of all gifts to the human race, and this gift is intrinsic within the divine story with which they had been entrusted. This story would become the means of empowering those who believed it to become spiritually transformed into a new creation, made-over in the image of the one who redeemed them.

***Monologue: The World Will Hate You***  
**(15:18-25)**

*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup>If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. <sup>20</sup>Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. <sup>21</sup>They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. <sup>22</sup>If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup>He who hates me hates my Father as well. <sup>24</sup>If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup>But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason,' [Psalms 35:19; 69:4].*

Why does Jesus bring “the world” into this discussion with his disciples? Because this will be the greatest deterrent to their accomplishing the task Jesus has set before them, as well as the greatest temptation they would experience, and the greatest object of conquest they would know.

Of first importance is to define the term “world.” In the Greek text this is the word *kosmos*, which, in its root, means, “order, ornamentation, decoration, or embellishment;” by extension it became the common term for

“the world order, the array of life in its various expressions of mankind dwelling upon the earth.” This is the meaning of *kosmos* as used throughout the secular Greco-Roman world. In Scripture, however, is used for the dominion of mankind ruled by the individual and aggregate self-will of the human race, and is set over against the dominion or rule of God, with which the world is in conflict.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the world is spoken of both as the planet earth and the habitation of mankind on the planet earth. It is in the NT that the world takes on the concept of a “thisworldly realm,” in which the conflict of good and evil is played out as set over against an “otherworldly realm,” which is the equivalent of the *basileia touo theou* – the kingdom or dominion of God.

The Greek term *kosmos* appears in the writings of John in 84 occurrences (57 occurrences in the Gospel, 24 in his letters, and 3 occurrences in Revelation. Why does John recall so much of Jesus’ teaching concerning the world? John’s use of the term *kosmos* in the Gospel, in the letters of John, and in the Revelation of John fall into five categories or “usages.” The **first usage** is the world as the created earth; this space-time-matter-energy realm of existence - the thisworldly realm: The Gospel of John 6:14; 8:23; 9:5, 39; 10:36, 11:27; 12:25, 46; 13:1; 16:21; 17:5, 11, 13, 15, 18; 18:36, 37; 1 John 2:2, 15, 16; 4:3, 4, 9, 17; and 2 John 1:7. The **second usage** is that of the world as mankind or the human race: The Gospel of John 1:10; 3:16, 17; 4:42; 6:33, 51; 7:4; 8:12; 12:19, 31, 47; 14:19, 22, 27, 31; 15:19; 16:20, 28, 33; 17:6, 9, 21, 23, 25; 18:20; I John 2:15-16; 4L3, 4, 14; and 2 John 1:7. The **third usage** is that of the world as the powers that rule in the thisworldly realm: The Gospel of John 7:7; 14:30; 15:18; 16:8, 11; 17:14, 16; 1 John 3:13; 4:4, 5; 5:4, 5, and 19. The **fourth usage** is that of the world as a realm of darkness: The Gospel of John 1:29; 14:17; 1 John 2:17; 3:1.

### *Jesus’ Concept of the World*

Jesus obviously had a concept of the world as he uses it here in John. What is that concept and how does John develop that concept in his writings? In John 1:10, John tells us, “He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.” Then in 3:19, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.” In John

14:16-17, the first farewell discourse, Jesus says to his disciples, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him." Then, in 15:18, the second discourse, he says to the eleven, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first;" and in 16:33, he says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Then, in the third discourse (the prayer), he prays, "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me." (John 17:25). In answer to the question of Pilate, Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place," (John 18:36).

### *Christianity and the World*

In the beginning the whole world was under the influence of God, those making up the human race believed in him, and they served him. Life was a paradise for them. But that changed! Following the flood, all of humanity was obedient to God. That didn't last! It seems that the world is always going to be "the world," and the world is not "of God;" rather, the world is "of the world." Those of the world don't serve God they serve the world. There does appear, however, to have always been a remnant dwelling within the world that has not been of the world but has been distinct from it and has always struggled to keep itself separate from it.

In Jesus' teaching and preaching he constantly emphasized the contrast between the world (i.e., those who are of the kingdom/rule of this world) and the kingdom of God (the *basileia tou theou*), the rule of God upon the earth, which began to manifest itself and move among the people of Israel in the teachings and the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth, and came to full realization in his resurrection into new existence.

Those of the kingdom of God, Jesus insisted, are those in whom the rule of God (the *basileia*) has become a reigning force. These are they of new creation existence. There is a difference between the two reigning forces under consideration here, and only those who are truly of the reign of God know the difference. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," says Jesus, "but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven," (Matt 7:21).

For the last 70 years of the first century AD, the development and spread of Christianity resulted from the work of the Apostles of Christ and those associated with them in their ministries, many mentioned in the NT. Following their deaths the church was led into the second century by individual Christians who had been under the influence of the Apostles or apostolic schools, such as the Pauline school, the Johannine school, etc. These were the ministers who labored with these apostles or their associates and continued the apostles' work after their deaths. These were principally known as the Greek Fathers, having written in Greek and being leaders of the Eastern or Greek speaking churches of the Mediterranean world; although Tertullian and Origin (second century) wrote in Latin and were of the Roman church. Some of the more prominent of the Greek fathers would be: Clement of Rome, Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons in Gaul, Justin Martyr (the greatest of the Greek apologists), Papias of Hierapolis in Phrygia, and Clement of Alexandria to name a few who left a writing legacy.

The forces opposing them and “the powers” against which they struggled were the same as those that opposed Jesus: “the world,” “the rulers of this world,” and “the forces of darkness in this world.” These are the principalities and powers against which Jesus struggled, against which his earliest followers struggled, and against which the early church struggled for the first three centuries of its existence that we are developing here.

During the two centuries (100-300 AD) that followed the close of the apostolic age (the first century AD proper), this new religion, thought to be nothing more than a messianic sect of Judaism, grew in a remarkable way. This was in spite of the fact that it was considered illegal by the Roman Empire and was persecuted to the extent of carrying out executions and martyrdoms of large numbers of those who called themselves “Christians.” The major first century persecutions were those of Nero (54-68 AD) and Domitian (81-96 AD). These persecutions were followed in the second century by the Emperors Trajan (98-117 AD) and Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD).

The church of Christ was clearly not seen as “of this world,” nor did the Christians see themselves as “of this world.” In fact, most of those considered to be leaders of this religious movement were executed in a public fashion in order to display the world contempt for the Lord of the

Christians, who they called “the Christ.” This movement, however, continued to spread throughout the Mediterranean world, making significant advances into the Western portion, even into Gaul, Britannia, and the Island of Britain.

During the late part of the third century, the Roman Emperor, Diocletian had divided the Roman Empire into two parts; an Eastern and Western rule, each having its own ruler. Then, in the first decade of the fourth century, 306 AD, Constantine became the Augustus of the Eastern Empire at the death of his father. Upon coming to power Constantine unilaterally ended all persecution in his territories with the, possibly because his mother, Helena, who had been put away by his father in order to marry another, had undergone a conversion to Christianity. Constantine himself, however, continued to practice his Greco-Roman paganism.

The next significant event occurred in 312 AD. Constantine had determined to move upon the Eastern Emperor. He marched his legions toward Rome and there something happened. Lactantius, who Constantine appointed as guardian of his son, and who was a confidant of the imperial family, reports that during the night before “the Battle of the Milvian Bridge” Constantine had a dream in which Christ appeared to him and commanded him to place “the sign of Christ” on the shields of his soldiers, with the instruction, “by this sign you will conquer.”

The next day Constantine was victorious and united the Roman Empire. He attributed his victory to the power of “the God of the Christians” and committed himself to Christianity from that day on. Constantine’s “acceptance” of Christianity was by no means complete in that he continued to observe much of his Paganism during his lifetime and wasn’t baptized until on his deathbed. In effect, the Roman government from that day forward took over Christianity or “the church” as it existed in the Roman Empire, which was formally declared in 313 AD with Constantine’s Edict of Milan?

Thus, Christianity was no longer at odds with “the world.” But what is it that Rome “took over?” The churches of the Western and Eastern portions of the Roman Empire became the official religious institutions of the Roman Empire. The individual churches fell under the control of government bureaucracies by the authority of the Emperor. Constantine appointed individuals to serve as the bureaucratic heads of various territorial

divisions of the churches throughout the empire. These were authoritative figures that functioned as the administrators of the churches, who ruled over the churches through bureaucracies staffed with leaders acting as pastoral heads of assigned groupings of congregations under the auspices of the Emperor – the rule (*basileia*) of Caesar, not the rule (*basileia*) of God.

Christianity was thus, “recognized!” It was accepted by its culture, which Jesus, as well as his apostles called, “the world.” Now, what is the significance of this? Or better, what was the consequence of all this? The church was not “at odds” with the world any more; unless “the world” could be defined as those who had not accepted Christianity, who had remained “Pagan.” The major question in all of this appears to be: “Had the Roman world accepted Christianity or had that which called itself “Christianity” accept it? Now, where did all this leave the primitive church?”

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