

John 15:1-17 Abiding in Christ and Bearing Fruit (4-14-2024)

Today, I have truths from this text. But before turning there, let me spend a few minutes in explanation.

These words were spoken the night before Jesus died as he pictured a vine and its branches, to teach something essential: life in the Son. There is nothing more important than union with Christ. Why? To be united with Christ is to have life. And not just physical life, but life eternal. The Apostle John says: **“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself”** (John 5:26). He also says, **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him”** (John 3:36). This means to have “life” in the Son is to have eternal life. This is why Jesus came . . . to give life. In Adam, all of us are dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:5). But, in Christ, we are restored. We are regenerated. We are born again. We have life eternal. The central verse in all the Book of John is this: **“but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”** (John 20:31). This is why Jesus says in v. 5: **“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.”**

When Jesus spoke of a vine, the disciples, who were Jewish men, would have understood this picture. In the OT, Israel was referred to as God’s vine. There are many examples. I will read one from Ps. 80:8-11: **“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.”** And then in v. 12 the mood changes as this vine does not bear fruit. **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, ¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. ¹⁶ They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!”** You see, Israel was the “*vine*” of God. But, in every case we read about this vine in the OT, it is fruitless. They constantly disobeyed and did not produce fruit. Now, all of a sudden, in John 15, Jesus says, **“*I am the vine.*”** In contrast to Israel, Jesus, as the true vine, bore good fruit. In every way that Israel, as God’s vine, failed to bear fruit, Jesus did not. I think of Ps. 1:1-3: **“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”** Our passage today is all about prosperity, in the true sense of the word. Our passage is about LIFE in the Son. Our passage is about fruit that comes from life in the Son.

1. The Source and Means of fruit for the Christian is Christ. I love this picture because I get to talk about my garden. Because of our upcoming trip, I’m not sure what I will do this year, but in past years, I always plant bush beans. But, it never fails that half-runners end up growing every 10 feet or so within the rows. And they spread out, which makes it almost impossible to run my tiller through the rows. When I do, I end up pulling the vines from their source and the beans die;

there is no fruit from the half-runners. Why? Because there is no life when I pull them from the vine. The secret of the branch's life, strength, vigor, beauty, and fertility is its connectivity with the vine. In the same way, as Christians, our fruit is dependent on our union with Christ. Think back to our picture from Ps. 1. Jesus is the "tree" planted beside the streams of waters." And where does his life come from? It comes from the Father (eternal generation). His life is the same as the Father's. Again, in John 5:26 we read: "**For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.**"

This is why Jesus can say "*apart from me you can do nothing!*" Jesus is the mediator between God and man. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through him. There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved than the name of Jesus Christ. He came to give us life. As Adam and his kin (all of us) were cut from their source of life, Christ came to give us LIFE. In John 17:22-23 Jesus says, "**The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.**" This is what it means to be a part of the vine, to be united with Christ and seated in the heavenly places. And if there is no union, there is no fruit!

2. There is no REAL fruit apart from Christ. Remember the context in which Jesus taught. All the disciples knew practically about religion was found in the teachings and examples of the religious leaders of that day. Their "*fruit*" was dependent upon the old covenant with all its regulations and principles. There was law upon law, tradition upon tradition, work upon work. Their fruits were dead because they were not grounded and connected with the Messiah. Their fruits were not acceptable to the Father because they were not grounded in principles of righteousness. And the very Messiah to which the Old Covenant pointed was now in their midst saying, "**Apart from me you can do nothing**" (John 15:5; cf. John 14:6). In that context Jesus was saying, "*Their fruits are not acceptable because they are not grounded in me.*"

The reason God looks down upon the good works of Christians is because He sees them "IN CHRIST." Brothers and Sisters, the good news of the Gospel is that Christ has taken our sins upon himself. And in return, he gives us his righteousness. A non-Christian may look at his good works and think God will accept him. But, this will never happen apart from faith in Christ. Every day, when I consider my works, I think how pitiful they are. I see how I have failed God. I see how I have sinned against him. I look at my heart and know my sins. I am the broken reed or the smoldering flax that is about to burn out. But, when God looks down upon me, He sees the person and work of his Son, and he sees the righteousness of the Son. Yes, there are consequences for sin in this world, but my position is in Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ. This is the Gospel!

3. Though many appear to be Christians, they are not united with Christ. In this parable we see branches that bear fruit and branches that do not bear fruit. There are "*branches in the vine*" which appear to be joined to the parent stem, and yet bear no fruit. In the same way there are men and women who appear to be members of Christ, and yet will prove finally to have had no vital union with Him. As with Israel in the OT, all were circumcised physically. But, as Paul says, "*They were not circumcised in their hearts.*" When you looked at them as a whole, you could not tell the difference (Consider the weeds growing beside my green beans, early on. Abby

often can't tell the difference.). Today, many people are "joined" to Christ in baptism and church membership. But, they lack the most important thing. They have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ, and Christ with them. In name, they are Christians, but in the sight of God, they are dead. There is no life!

One of the most dreadful verses in all the Scriptures is found in Matt. 7:21-23: Jesus said, "**Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**"²² **On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?**"²³ **And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'**"

So, how do we know we are in Christ? The answer to this question is found in vv. 10-17. I will read these verses again and then make some comments to answer this question "*How do we know?*" **"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. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another."** So, 5 ways we know if we have life in Christ.

First you believe in Jesus Christ. Back in 14:1 Jesus says, "**Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.**" You believe He is the True Vine. Israel failed as God's vine. But, Jesus did not. This means you believe everything the Bible says about the Son. You know you have no hope in this world outside the vine. There is only death and separation from God. But, in the vine, in the Son, there is life, and this is life eternal. And part of this "abiding" is a true conviction for sin and a desire to change. THIS IS FRUIT!

Second, Fruit is seen in the context of making disciples. Look at v. 16: "**You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit . . .**" Here, Jesus appoints us to a task. What is this task? The "bearing fruit" here, I believe, is to make disciples. In other words, disciples are disciple makers. Those who bear fruit make disciples in this world! This is a big question for me/for us! This is a huge area for thought and discussion as to practicality. But, at the least, are you telling others about Jesus. And, are you teaching those who believe to "*obey the commands of Christ?*" Now, I know we can't see this quickly. But, over time, is this what is coming from your life? Parents, are you making disciples of your children? Grandparents, what about you? Are you praying for those you work with, that they may be saved? If your children or your spouse are not believers, are you praying for them and taking opportunities to share and teach? Are your conversations seasoned with salt?

Third, Fruit is described as keeping the commandments of Christ. In this passage (John 14-17 particularly), Jesus speaks about the words he has spoken to his disciples and the words that will come later to all his disciples. Verse 3: **“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”** Verse 7: **“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you . . .”** Verse 11: **“These things I have spoken to you . . .”** Today, all the words of the Bible are the Words of Christ. Are you obedient to these words? And, when you are not, are you trusting Christ to cover your sins. Is there repentance in your heart as you strive to obey in godliness?

Fourth, fruit is pictured in a special relationship with Christ. VV. 13-14: **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”** Only you know if Christ is your friend or not. But, do you treat him as a friend? Do you tell him your thoughts, your secrets, your aspirations, do you “hang out” with him? And as v. 15 says, **“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing,; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”** Are you privy to the will of God in the Bible?

Fourth, fruit is pictured in answered prayer. V. 16b **“so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”** Also back in v. 7: **“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”**

Fifth, fruit is associated with those who love one another. V. 12: **“This is my commandments, that you love one another as I have loved you.”**

4. Abiding in Jesus is the proof of our fruits. Seven times in the first 10 verses we see the word “abide.” It simply means remain. So from one perspective, we see that if we “abide” or “remain” in Jesus, we will bear fruit. But, from another perspective, I would say that our “abiding” in Jesus is in some way the proof of our fruits. In other words, *“He who endures until the end will be saved.”* There are many who would take this passage on the vine and the branches to say that a person can fall away from the faith. But, that is not what this passage is teaching. John the Apostle, as he spoke of those who left the faith, said **“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us”** (1 John 2:19). I am willing to argue that “abiding” itself is a fruit of the Spirit. So, what does an abiding person look like? I think we’ve already seen this in the fruits above.

An abiding person is one that sticks to Christ. It is like chapstick on your lips. The person who abides in Christ loves him, and this love is greater than any other love. This person says with the Apostle Peter, when asked if he will leave Christ: *“Where else can I go? You have the words of eternal life,”* and *“Though everyone else leaves you, I will not.”* These are the words of a Christian! In this way, ALL of Christ’s true disciples abide. At the same time it becomes a test case for everyone in this world; it applies to both non-Christians and Christians alike. How, you might ask? Well, everyone of us must abide in Christ. There is no life outside the vine! And there is no true fruit outside the vine. So, if you are non-Christian, outside of Christ, you have no life. **“He who has the Son has life, but he who does not have the Son does not have life”** (1 John 5:12). So, if you are here and you are not a Christian believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved.

And if you come to him, your abiding begins. Life comes. You are a branch. And fruit will begin to bud. This is what it means to abide in Christ!

And in principle, it is no different for the Christian. To abide is be found in Son, the true vine. And how do we know if we are abiding. It is the fruit of your life. This is why I believe this passage is so vital for the Christian. It is not that we are “keeping” ourselves in the vine. God does this. God is the vinedresser (v. 1). This passage helps us to see IF we are abiding, if we are in the vine, if we are in Christ. Brothers and sisters, there is nothing more important than abiding in Christ.