
Abide in Me

John 15

Text

John 15:1-11

Introduction

I have given my testimony in this Church of how I came to know Christ. I never would have come to a point where I understood my need for a Savior, had I not read the Scripture. And the man who was most instrumental in leading me to Christ answer some questions, but the most important thing he did was to encourage me to read the Book of John.

To this day I remember reading it and thinking “this is presenting Jesus AS God”. I also remember thinking “I need to be born-again”.

It has been 24 years since then. After all these years of being a Christian, I can still pick up that book and be challenged by its depth. Sometimes as I study, I even wonder if I really understood a passage at all.

John’s gospel shows us that there are several kinds of belief that do not save. Nicodemus in chapter 3 comes to Jesus and says “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do, unless God is with him.” Did that belief save him? No.

In chapter 6 Jesus fed the 5,000 and on the next day, we find this. Verse 26 “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Starting in verse 32 we have Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They said to him, Sir give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.”

Throughout the book there are encounters with people who either reject or believe, and these encounters include the disciples.

Then a good student of the Bible will notice that John has been doing something as he moves from chapter 6 through to chapter 15. John has strung multiple “I am” passages together.

I Am the Bread of Life (6:35,41,48,51)

I Am the Light of the world (8:12)

I Am the Door of the sheep (10:7,9)

I Am the Good Shepherd (10:11,14)

I Am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)

I Am the true Vine (15:1,5)

Each of these sections present something about Christ, and I will leave that to your own study. But in chapter 15 Christ is the Vine and there is an exhortation to abide in Christ. And that is what I’d like to focus on this evening.

Before we go to our text, I’d like to spend some time describing the setting. It is important because it guides us to the right interpretation of our passage. Let’s try to go back and play the movie of Jesus’ last Passover. I’m going to read excerpts from several of the gospels and also give some summarizations. It is the day before Jesus’ crucifixion.

Setting

Mark 14:12-17 “And on the first day of Unleavened Bread when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, “Where do you want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?” And He sent two of His disciples, and said to them “Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, “The Teacher says, “Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?” “And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; and prepare for us there.” And the disciples went out, and came to the city and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. And when it was evening, He came with the twelve.”

We find from Exodus 12:6 that the Passover lamb or goat is supposed to be killed at twilight.

Luke 22:14-16 “When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

Then before the meal, Jesus girds himself with a towel and washed the disciple’s feet (John 13:1-20). This cleansing was important. Remember Simon objected and Jesus said “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”

Next, Jesus says that He will be betrayed. The disciples motion to John, who is leaning on Jesus, to ask who it is. Jesus responded “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas. (John 13:23-26)

Then Satan fills Judas’ heart and Judas walked down the steps into the **darkness** as he **leaves** to betray Jesus. (Note: We know it is dark, not only from the Exodus 12:6 passage, but also from the fact that the Romans bring torches to the garden)

When Jesus gave the morsel to Judas, it should have been clear to the disciples that Judas was the betrayer, but it apparently was not obvious.

The next discussion we know of is a dispute between the disciples about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24-30). Can’t you just imagine the sophomoric conversation? Who is it that will betray Jesus? I wouldn’t do it! From next to him comes “Well neither would I.” Then many chime-in in unison and say “Well I wouldn’t either.” I’m devoted. I’m a good disciple.” Another says “Well I’m better than you are.” or something of that sort. The scripture only describes it as “a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.”

Jesus may have heard a particular boast from Peter. Jesus breaks in for a teaching moment. John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give to you that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Also in our sequence of events Peter asks “where are you going? Jesus responds “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow me afterward”. (John 13:36)

Next, Jesus gives the prediction of Peter’s denial (John 13:37-38), but Luke 22:31-38 brings out a spiritual warning. Jesus says “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

In chapter 14 he talks about “My Father’s house” and about preparing a place for them. He also said “And you know the way where I am going.” Thomas stated that he didn’t know where Jesus was going or how to get there.

John 14:12-14 Jesus says “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

John does not even mention the eating of the Passover meal or the institution of the Lord’s Supper, but IF the Harmony of the Gospels is correct, the Passover occurs now in the sequence of events.

At the end of John 14 we have a shift in setting. The last verse says “Get up, let us go from here.” So they are now walking to the Garden of Gethsemane.

It would not surprise me, that as they walk to the garden, they pass a vineyard.

John 15 is a literary type called a metaphor. A metaphor is a way of conveying an idea by describing it in terms of something else. An example is “The Kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed on the soil” Mark 4:26 or “The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed...” Mark 4:30-31 We commonly use similes, which are one-word metaphor, such as “wise as a fox” or “quiet as a mouse”.

As we read, see if you notice when Jesus stays within the metaphor and when He jumps out.

This brings us to our text.

Read John 15:1-11.

Prayer

There are three characters The Vinedresser, the Vine and a group of people described as branches. Jesus uses the interaction of these three characters in order to teach us something about abiding. Let’s see what we uncover.

The Work of the Father

(v.1-4)

Jesus opens this metaphor by introducing all in the cast of characters. Let’s look again at verses 1 and 2. He says:

“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 bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

We have a vinedresser, a vine and branches. Let’s look at the first. The Vinedresser represents the Father. Something that we should notice is that He is the one taking the major action. He inspects the branches looking for fruit and He has two responses.

He Takes Away when there is no Fruit

(v.2a)

He Prunes when there is Fruit

(v.2b)

The disciples are not going to understand what Jesus means by these two statements. There is “fruit”, “taking away” and “pruning”. What does this all mean? They raise many questions that get answered later in our text, so I’m just going to go on.

The Key to Interpretation

(v. 3)

In verse 3, Jesus says, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” Did you notice the transition? Jesus has been using metaphor, but now He says “**You** are already clean”. He steps away from using metaphor language and addresses those whom he called the branches.

Turn with me to John 13:10. John 15:3 is meant to stand with John 13:10 and 11. Those verses say:

“Jesus said to him, ‘He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’ 11 For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’”

Let’s put some pieces together. In John 13 when Judas was present, Jesus said “you are clean, but not all of you”. Then Judas leaves. In John 15, Jesus walks with the remaining disciples to Gethsemane and says “you are clean”.

We don’t have to guess about who this parable speaks about. **Christ said “You are the branches.” He meant all twelve of the disciples which includes Judas.**

The eleven disciples who are left are the branches that have produced fruit. When Christ says “you are clean” He is speaking of them.

What about Judas? Few places in Scripture mention Judas. One place, however, is John 12:4-6 where it says:

But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

Judas had been in the presence of Christ. He has been on the vine. Now the time of the Vinedresser's inspection has come. Judas has heard the message, he has seen the miracles, but there has not been heart change or belief. There was no fruit in his life. He was a thief. **So, Judas is the example of the non-abiding branch.**

Cleansing is so important to this text. In verse 2 it says "and every branch that bears fruit, He **prunes** so that it may bear more fruit." The Greek word for the verb 'to prune' is καθαίρω (pronounced Ka-thigh-row). This looks very close to the verb "to cleanse" καθαρίζω (pronounced Kath-a-ridz-o). My point is that even in the choosing of the metaphor of a vine, there was meaning in using the verb "to prune" which gives illusion to the cleansing through the Word.

Up to this time, the Vinedresser or The Father has been doing the action. Let's look at the Branch.

The Relationship between the Disciples and Christ

(v. 4-11)

Verses 4 through 11 speak about the function of the branches.

Abide with Christ

(v. 4a)

John 15:4 "Abide in me, and I in you."

μείνατε – 1 Aorist, Imperative, 2 person plural of μένω

I've already pointed out that Jesus is speaking to the remaining disciples. In fact, we could call them the abiding ones. Jesus tells them to do something – to abide.

Jesus hasn't told us much about the meaning of the word 'abide'. Do you notice that it does not fit in the metaphor. 'Abide' is not a vineyard kind of word.

In the book of John this word is translated by one of two verbs – either "abide" or "remain". It is an ordinary day-to-day kind of word. Many verbs have a noun form, and this verb does too. The noun indicates a place to live and we would translate it to the word "abode", or "dwelling place" or "apartment".

Perhaps the word 'dwelling place' reminds you of John 14:2

“In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.”

Translations of this word in other New Testament books include: to stay, to continue, to dwell, lodge or sojourn, to rest, to settle, to endure, to be existent, to indwell, to be permanent. Hopefully you can see the idea of residence in the different translations.

When Christ told the disciples to ‘abide’ or ‘remain’, what did he mean? I believe that “abiding” is the equivalent as living their life “in Christ”. They are to make their home with the things of Christ, not content with pursuing the things of this world.

The Warning of Not Abiding

(v. 4b)

After Jesus commands the disciples to abide, he warns them of the result of not abiding. The rest of verse 4 spells it out.

“As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

Three years the disciples have been with Jesus and have gone out to proclaim the gospel. Jesus was the one who had given them the authority over unclean spirits. Jesus was the one who had given them the ability to do miracles. Jesus was the source of the strength. After Jesus is crucified, will that source end? No, he will continue to be their source.

This warning is also going to help the disciples understand what they will see from Judas, perhaps within the hour. They will see a kiss of betrayal. It will explain why Judas will betray for money. Judas loves money. It will explain why Judas escapes from his guilt by committing suicide.

Abiding Bears Much Fruit

(v. 5)

Verse 5 says:

“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

If you are abiding in Christ, then you will bear fruit in your life. It is at this point that we should all ask “Well then, what is fruit?”

Looking at the parable, Christ doesn’t say what fruit is. If you wanted to know what actions Christ meant when He used the word fruit, what reference would you go to? Would anybody look for it

in this passage? Jesus does give a command later in verse 12. That command is “love one another.” And by-the-way, this is also the “old command” that is spoken of in 1 John 2:7. Then in 1 John 2:10 John says “Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.” Love is the greatest of fruits.

[Story of the Apostle John in later years as recorded from the Early Church Fathers. “Love one another”]

There are of course other fruits. In Galatians 5 Paul talks about “walking by the Spirit” which is practically the same as abiding. He takes this garden or vineyard language and expands it into a list. Verse 22 tells us “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”. Keep a finger on this page.

John 15:5 is a great verse for meditation.

Non-Abiding Branches are Cut Off...

(v. 6)

Let’s look at verse 6. It says

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

I notice that verse 6 begins with the words “if anyone”. This metaphor has been speaking specifically about the disciples. It looks as if a principle is now stated that applies to everyone.

There are five elements listed here:

They are cast out.

They wither.

They are gathered.

They are thrown into the fire.

They are burned.

I’ve already stated that Judas is the example of the non-abiding branch. Judas had an impressive resume. He had left everything, and had been named as one of the 12 disciples. He had the privilege of spending time with Christ, of hearing Christ’s teachings. Perhaps he had been sent as a missionary. He accompanied Christ as Christ taught from region to region. Yet Judas did not abide. He was a fake. He was still blind to his sin and he did not respond with confession and repentance.

What happened to Judas? He is no longer part of the group. After he betrayed Jesus was he full of joy? No, his joy withered and he committed suicide. In the spiritual realm, there will be a time of

gathering when all are judged. Judas will be thrown into the Lake of Fire where he will be burned for the rest of eternity.

Here are some of the characteristics of those who do not abide. If you still have your finger in Galatians 5 lets look at verse 19 & 20.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Brothers and sisters, there is a seriousness about these sins. Christ is constantly purifying His church.

Abiding yields Answered Prayer (v. 7)

Well verse 6 speaks of the non-abiding branches. In verse 7 we have a benefit to the abiding branches. Abiding yields answered prayer.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

There are two other places in the book of John where Jesus promises to answer the prayer of the disciples.

In 14:13 Jesus is with the disciples and talking to Philip, and he says: “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

16:24 “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”

This promise to answer prayer has conditions. First they must be abiding in Christ. Second, Christ’s Words must abide in them. It looks like they have some responsibility to stay in God’s Word; to let the Word shape their prayers; to stay within the confines of the Word.

Jesus promises to do is “whatever [the disciples] wish”. They exercised this after Pentecost and we have a few examples in the book of Acts.

Acts 3:1-8 “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried,

whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

Acts 5:12 "Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles."

The ministry of Christ is continued by the Apostles.

Christ

We have worked our way through most of this text. We have seen the work of the Vinedresser, we have examined the branches, it is appropriate that we should conclude by looking at Christ, the Vine.

The Love of Christ

(v.9, 10)

Verses 9 and 10 tell us of the Love of Christ:

"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.

The Father loves The Son and gave Christ commandments. So Christ loves us and gives us commandments. Commandments keep us inside the commander's will.

Some commands are temporary. I think the best example is that of parents with children. Children mature as they go through childhood. They have bad judgment before they have good judgment. You tell your 3 year olds not to go in the street so that they don't get hit by cars. You tell them to hold you hand when you are in a parking lot. Do you still hold your mom's hand? Commands help us until we are mature enough not to have them.

Some commands are always good for us. Christ says that He has kept His Father's commandment and has abided in His love. Commandments are one of His expressions of love to us. Our keeping His commandments are one of our expressions of love back to God. Keeping Christ's commandments is not a new message in the book of John. John 14:15-17 says

“15 “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 16 “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

The Joy of Christ

(v.11)

Verse 11, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

Again I think of you that are privileged to have children. What a joy must be when after years of picking up after them and making them pick up their toys your child or perhaps teenager surprises you by doing something nice on his own initiative. You ask him, “Why did you do this?” and he responds “Because I love you.” Doesn't that produce joy?

Obedience will also result in joy for the disciples. I've known a few of pastors and missionaries. When God gives a passion for serving and God opens up an avenue for serving in that place, most of the time there is joy, even under conditions of great personal sacrifice.

Conclusion

Let's bring this to a conclusion.

We have seen the work of the Father. He takes away the non-fruit bearing branches and He prunes the bearing branches. That is His work.

We thank God that we are clean through the Word.

The job for us comes by considering the command to abide. Are you abiding? Do you see fruit in your life? Do you see it predominately in a love for people? Do you make time for others? Are you finding your spiritual gifts and ways in which to use them to build up others in the church?

When I think of the phrase 'in Christ' or 'in Me' I wonder “Do you have a desire for the things of God? If not, what is so important that you are pursuing?”

Do you see God answering your prayers? God extended to the disciples an extraordinary offer to answer whatever they wished. In my study of the Scriptures, I've found a little narrower scope for us non-Apostles, but He didn't leave us out in the cold. Remember in Acts 12 Peter was in prison and his chains fell off. He walks right out. He heads over to the house of Mary, John's mother. What are they doing? It says "where many were gathered together and were praying." If you consider your own prayer life and you don't see God answering your prayers, I'd ask you to make a change. Read one of the Epistles which are rich in practical life-application exhortations. Make your prayers spring out of what you read.

There is one last thing that I want to leave you thinking about - the disciples now know that there is a time pruning which the Father would take them through - a pruning which would bring forth more fruit. Do you recognize God's pruning stuff out of your life? Maybe it hurts. Can you give God thanks for it? He did it so that you would bear much fruit.

Prayer