

John 15:1-17

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[0 : 00] Well, today we continue our series looking at the Gospel of John, where we've been looking at the heart of Jesus.

And today we'll be reading from John 15, verses 1 through 17. And we'll see in these passages how this focuses on the latter days of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus has come into Jerusalem for the Passover. He has just celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples. And now he's literally in his final hours before he is going to be betrayed, arrested, convicted, and crucified.

So we see in this passage Jesus' heart as we see what he finds most crucial to communicate to his disciples. So before we read this passage, I want to say one of the blessings that I have experienced with my family in the last year or so is being able to read books aloud.

And though my wife and I, Rachel, we've read to our children since they've been born, we've kind of graduated to a new level. Our children are 7, 6, and 3. And now we've gone to the point where we can actually dig into some good classic children's literature and have the children sit transfixed as they hear about mystery and fantasy.

[1 : 16] Things like the Chronicles of Narnia or Harry Potter. A classic that we actually just finished over the recent holiday was *The Secret Garden*, a book by Francis Hodges Burnett.

And you may be familiar with the story. It takes place in the early 20th century in Yorkshire, England. And the main character in this book is a girl named Mary Lennox.

Mary grew up in India to wealthy British parents, although she was largely unloved and uncared for in her youth.

When her parents end up dying in India, she is shipped back to England to live with her uncle in the Yorkshire countryside in his large state. And so the story follows Mary as she adjusts to a new lifestyle and a new culture and to a new landscape.

She makes friends with a boy in the village named Dickon. She realizes she has a cousin who's very sickly, Colin, who lives in the same house. And the story follows them as they develop this friendship.

[2 : 18] And as Mary discovers the secret garden in her uncle's estate, one day she's walking and she discovers a key that's buried in the ground. And she uses that key eventually to find this hidden door, which leads to this secret garden.

And so we see in this story the work that Mary does with her friends to bring life into this garden that had been largely neglected. We see the fruitfulness that comes through pruning and cleaning.

And that's the same theme that we're going to see in this passage today. We see that Jesus refers to himself as the true vine. He talks about the fruitfulness that we have in him when we are his branches.

So let's read together from John 15, verses 1 through 17. It says, My command is this.

Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

[4 : 34] I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that lasts. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

This is my command. Love each other. This is the word of God. Pray with me. Lord, we thank you for this passage. We pray now that you will open our eyes and open our ears to see what you desire to communicate to us, especially with a passage that we are familiar with, God.

May you make it alive in our hearts. Bless our time together in the word this morning. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. And so we see in this passage that Jesus refers to himself as the true vine. In the book, in the Gospel of John, we've seen that Jesus made several I am statements. This is actually the seventh and final statement that's recorded in the Gospel of John. And as we've heard throughout this series that Jesus says that I am the bread of life.

[5 : 46] He says, I am the light of the world. I am the gate. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And finally, in this passage, we see Jesus say, I am the true vine. You see, in each of these statements that Jesus makes, he's revealing to us his character. He's revealing to us that he is the Messiah that has been prophesied, that has come to save his people.

And so what I want to focus on today, in part, is looking at the character of Jesus. When we see him as the true vine, what does that reveal to us about his character? But not only that, I want us to see what Jesus is calling us to as his people as well.

So we'll focus on the character of Jesus and also the calling of his people. So as we look to the character of Jesus and see him described as the true vine, we recognize that Jesus has been using these metaphors that would be very familiar to someone in that time period.

As James had talked about earlier, when Jesus says, I am the good shepherd, we recognize that living in agrarian society, people would be around sheep often. They'd know what a shepherd does.

[6 : 57] Likewise, when he talks about a vineyard, people would know about vines and about grapes and how to produce wine. But that's not the only reason that Jesus uses this symbol to say that he is the true vine.

It's important because the vine is actually a very important symbol within Israel's history. We see in the Old Testament repeatedly that Israel is referred to as the vine.

If we were to read from Psalms 80, starting in verse 8, it says this, You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the sea. It shoots as far as the river. If you're not familiar with the story of the Old Testament, we see early on that God comes to a man named Abram.

And he says that he has chosen him to be God's people, he and his family. He says that his descendants are going to number the stars and that through his family, the nations will be blessed.

[8 : 04] So Israel is the descendants of Abraham, and they are who is called the vine in this passage.

However, every time that we see a vine described in this Old Testament, we also see an element of unfaithfulness that follows and judgment that follows that.

If we go to verse 16 of chapter 80 in Psalms, it says, Your vine is cut down. It is burned with fire. At your rebuke, your people perish.

We see that judgment that comes because Israel is not being fruitful as God has intended. They have not been a blessing to the nations as God had wanted them to be.

Instead, they have lived comfortable, isolated, inward-facing lives. And so Jesus steps in and he says something quite radical here. He's actually replacing himself as the vine.

[9 : 04] He says, No longer is Israel the vine. I am the true vine. And we recognize that in substituting himself for Israel, he's taking the place because Israel and fulfilling what Israel has failed to be.

And this would essentially be pretty jarring for a Jew in that day and age. Many of whom find their connection to God based on their ethnicity. And Jesus is saying, Your heritage doesn't matter anymore.

It's not the law-keeping that you do. It's not your customs. All that matters to be a true Israelite is to be connected to me. Jesus is essentially stripping them of their identity and the security that they thought they had in God.

And I think we see that nowadays as well. I mean, we have people in our culture or maybe even within the church who think they are connected to God simply because they grew up in the church or they attend church occasionally.

Maybe they think they're a good person or they try to do good things. And Jesus says, No. It's not your past good works. It's not your half-hearted acquiescence to Christianity or the church that is

going to save you.

[10:13] It's your connection to me. And so that's what we see about Jesus in this passage. As the true vine, he says he is the giver of true life. And so what does that mean for us as his people?

What is his calling for us if Jesus is the vine and we are to be his branches? Well, it says that we are to remain in him.

If we look at verse 4, it says, 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.

We see this verb remain over and over again in this passage. Some Bibles translate it as abide. And so God is asking us to or calling us to abide in him.

It's a really natural position for a branch to have, right? I mean, this is what a branch does. A branch doesn't grow apart from the vine and then somehow connected in. A branch gets its life from the vine in order to grow and be fruitful and to prosper.

[11:19] The same for us in that God is the giver. Jesus is the giver of life. And it's that through him that we experience fruitfulness. And not only is Jesus in us, as it says in this passage, or that we are to be in him, but he says also that he is in us.

If we were to look back just at the previous chapter where Jesus is continuing this conversation with his disciples in John 14, 11, he says, I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

It's the same parallel sentence structure that he's using now to communicate that we are in Jesus.

So recognize that Jesus is welcoming us into the same relationship that he has with the Father.

He's giving us access to the Father through himself. And so imagine the connectedness that we can have, the intimacy that we have with God the Father and God the Son. When we are in Jesus and Jesus is in us and Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus, we also have in verse 1, the Father referred to as the gardener who does the pruning.

And so we are welcome into an intimate relationship with the triune God through the life of Jesus.

But I think it's important to remember that when we think of abiding, that can easily be thrown around and kind of become a cliché in Christian circles, right?

[12:41] We can kind of think of abiding and think of it as a synonym for just resting or some excuse for passivity. That's not what Jesus intended here. Our ultimate expression of abiding in Jesus is not just some level of inward serenity.

Because ultimately, God's glory is not fulfilled simply through our abiding. God's glory is fulfilled as a result of our abiding. And that's what we see Jesus say. Not only does he call us to abide, but he calls us to bear fruit, the natural consequence of being in Christ.

And so we look at verse 5. It says, I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, he can do nothing.

It's really a quite simple equation, right? If we are in Jesus, we will bear fruit. If we're not in Jesus, we are not going to bear fruit. One of the surprises that we had when we arrived in Edinburgh, we discovered we had an apple tree in our garden.

And especially because we had to quarantine for two weeks when we arrived, it actually provided a lot of entertainment for the kids to be able to pick apples and eat these apples. And it was a great time to arrive with a tree just heavy laden with them.

[13:59] But what do you think, though, if I thought that or knew that you liked apples? And so next season, I decide, well, I want to share my apples with others in Beclaw.

So I decide, say, in June to go out to my apple tree and I cut off a limb and bring it to your house.

And I say, this doesn't have any apples on it yet, but hold on to it for a few months. Put it in the sun, maybe get a little water, and you're going to have some great apples.

Of course, you look at me like I'm crazy, right? Because we recognize that a branch that's not connected to the tree is not going to bear fruit. There's not going to be any apples. It's going to shrivel and die.

And that's exactly what Jesus says happens to those who don't abide in him. And he says what happens when we are fruitless. He makes it very clear if we look in verse 2.

It says, he, referring to the Father, cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. If we jump to verse 6, it says, If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

[15:03] Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. We see that the sole purpose of the branch is to bear fruit. And it makes sense, right?

I mean, when you think about a vine, it's a pretty utilitarian plant, right? You can't use it to make lumber. It's not a really attractive plant. It doesn't provide a whole lot of shade. If it's not producing fruit, it's really useless.

And if we had time to go back to the Old Testament in the book of Ezekiel, God actually says through the prophet Ezekiel, He calls Jerusalem a useless vine. And He calls them that because of the fact that they are not being fruitful.

And as a result, they are going to face judgment. And so that's that same judgment that we see in these verses, that when a branch is not producing fruit, it will be picked up and thrown into the fire and burned.

And I think that's easy to gloss over, but I think it's important to recognize that those who are not in Christ are not safe. There's no safe middle ground here. If we're not in Christ, there is coming judgment.

[16:07] But not only that, the second part of verse 2, it says, We see that this is God's desire for our lives, that we may be fruitful, that others, outsiders, non-believers will recognize the goodness of God through the fruit that we produce.

And so we need to look at what does it mean to be fruitful and how are we to be fruitful. That's really what the second part of this passage focuses on.

And so I'd like to focus on two things, two main ways that we can be fruitful in our relationship with God. The first being communication with God. And the second, a love for Jesus and a love for others.

So let's look at communication first, starting in verse 7. It says, It's interesting because Jesus had just said, if we remain in him, he remains in us.

And now he says, if we remain in him, his words remain in us. So Jesus is essentially equating himself with the word. Which is not surprising if we're familiar with the Gospel of John, right?

[17:27] Because we see that this is a theme that's repeated throughout this Gospel. That Jesus is referred to as the word. In John 1, 1 John 1 says, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

John 1, 14, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus equates himself with the word. Jesus and his revelation are virtually interchangeable because Jesus is the incarnate revelation.

And so this is essentially what he's telling his disciples. Look, you've been with me for three years. You've seen my public ministry. You've heard me preach. You've seen me do miracles. We've had private conversations and meals together.

You should understand what my true character is. My word is the sum total of everything that I have told you. So abide in my word. And so that goes for us as well.

Though we don't have Jesus in the flesh in front of us today, we do have the Bible. God's mean of communication with us. And we should have that same desire for his word to sink in deeply.

[18:34] That we may study it and know it and meditate on it. You know, when my wife and I were dating, we dated for three years in university before we got married. And one summer we had to spend the summer apart.

I was doing an internship in South Carolina. My wife was in Northern California working at a very remote Christian camp. And where there was no internet, there was no cell phone service, our only means of communication was through letter writing that summer.

And I remember the eagerness and anticipation I had to receive some of her letters. And when I got that letter, I would tear it open and I'd read it. And I'd read it again. And I'd read it again.

Then, if I didn't get a letter that day, I'd go back to a previous letter that I got and I'd read that letter. The same went for Rachel. You know, we wanted to know what the other person was doing. We wanted to know their heart.

And so we should approach the gospel in the same way, with the same hunger and eagerness. You know, we just talked about in the student Bible study just last week as how to study the Bible.

[19:33] And one of the postures that we should have when we approach the gospel is a sense of desperation and hunger. We read from Jeremiah 15, 16, which says, Your word came and I ate them.

They were my joy and my heart's delight. So if we want to be in communion with God, if we want to bear fruit, we have to be in his word. And not only that, it's a two-way communication, right?

If we are going to listen to God through his word, we have a means of communication through prayer to him. And verse 7 ends, Ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.

That's an amazing promise that we have, right? But before we start thinking of Jesus as some sort of genie in a bottle, and he's going to start delivering our truckloads of cash that we request, right? Let's think about the fact that he has called us to be branches. And so what does a branch want? What would a branch request? It would be fruitfulness.

[20 : 33] It would be life through the vine, right? And so when we are in the word and the word is in us, our desires are going to completely align with Jesus' desires.

Our wills will be the same. And so I think that's important to see because the ultimate result of that, it says in verse 8, is going to be the Father's glory.

And so not only do we bear fruit through communication with God, but we bear fruit through love for Jesus and for others. Let's look at verse 9 through verse 11.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. 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.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. We see, first of all, that our love for Jesus is marked by obedience.

[21 : 37] The two are naturally connected. Again, if we were to turn back to John 14, 23, the previous chapter, it says, if anyone, Jesus says, if anyone remains, excuse me, if anyone loves me, he keeps my commands.

And we just see in this verse, verse 10, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. So our love for Christ motivates us to obey, and our obedience to Christ demonstrates our love.

And this is an obedience that is ultimately going to bring joy, as it says. In verse 11, that our joy may be made complete. So this isn't a half-hearted obedience.

This isn't a begrudging obedience. This is obedience that comes with joy. Not that obedience is always easy, but we recognize that as we obey, we are motivated by God's love and filled with his joy.

Not only is our love to be obedient love, but we see it as supposed to be self-sacrificing love as well. Jesus is foreshadowing his own death that is to come in a matter of hours, where he will give his life as a ransom for many.

[23 : 07] And so this is the amazing reality of the God that we love and that we serve, that he would send his son to live a perfect life, die a horrible death, be raised from the dead, because of his great self-sacrificing, unconditional love for sinners like us.

And so it's through that love that he wants us also to love others. Our love for others should be an outpouring of Christ's love for us.

Not because other people deserve it, but because God deserves it. And lastly, our love must be an attractive love. Verse 16, 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. This is my command, love each other. See, our relationship with Jesus is not meant to be a comfortable little bubble.

Jesus' love by its very nature invites others in. We see in this passage that Jesus is actually using it as a commissioning of sort to his disciples.

[24 : 22] Jesus knows that he's going to be departing from his disciples. And these are the final instructions that he's giving them, what their mission should be, that they should go out, that he has appointed them to go out to love others, to bear fruit.

And so it should be with us as well, right? Us as the church, we have God's mission to be fruitful, to show the world our love, that they may recognize and be able to taste and see that the Lord is good.

You know, I started by talking about the secret garden, and this was a wonderful ending to this book. I want to read just a passage from it. We see that the book concludes, the story ends with Mary in this garden, with her friend Dickon and her cousin Colin.

And through all their work, and they recognize the fruitfulness of their labor. They see a garden that they're surrounded by, that's in full bloom. Not only that, but they recognize the transformation that's occurred from death to life in the garden, and also in their own lives.

And Colin, who had been, excuse me, yeah, Colin, who had been an invalid for most of his life, he stands, and he says, I feel, I feel as if I want to shout out something, something thankful, joyful. [25 : 43] Ben Weatherstaff, who's a gardener, suggests that he sing the doxology. But because Dickon, or excuse me, Colin had not ever been to church, had never heard the doxology, he didn't know how to sing it.

And so Dickon, his friend, offers to sing it for him. Dickon stood out among the trees and rose bushes, and began to sing in quite a simple matter-of-fact way, and in a nice strong boy voice. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen. When he had finished, Colin's face was thoughtful and appreciative. Sing it again, Dickon, he said. Let us try, Mary. I want to sing it too. It's my song.

How does it begin? Praise God from whom all blessings flow. And they sang it again, and Mary and Colin lifted their voices as musically as they could, and Dickon's swelled quite loud and beautiful.

[26 : 46] And so may that be our desire as God's people, that an unbelieving world will see our fruit, a product of God's love, and desire to give glory to the Father.

If you're here today or listening online and you are not a believer, I want you to recognize that there's no safe ground. Jesus desires a relationship with us.

If we remain outside Jesus, there is coming judgment. But God welcomes us in through his Son, that we may remain in Christ and Christ in us. That is the source of true life.

Maybe you're someone who considers yourself a Christian. You like to do good things. You occasionally come to church, but there's no real fruit in your life.

Recognize that all your efforts, all your labor is in vain when we're not connected to the true vine. I would encourage you to examine your life, to see if you are truly connected to Jesus, our vine.

[27 : 56] And lastly, if you are a believer, if you are bearing fruit, if you are connected to the true vine, I encourage you, continue bearing fruit. God wants us to bear more fruit.

Be ready for pruning. Though it may be uncomfortable and difficult at times, Jesus desires to see fruit in our lives. Not that we can be puffed up, but that our joy may be filled, so that others may see our good works, that the nations may be blessed, and God would receive all the glory, and all the honor, and all the praise.