

Remaining in the vine

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[0:00] In a moment we're going to look at this together, but let me just first, and I think it would be deeper than employment, although employment is a worthy thing.

For young women, I think that's an even more difficult question these days. In some cultures it would be, the path that a young woman would take would be pretty much mapped out, but now there are lots of choices.

And what for a young woman is a worthwhile life? Does it necessarily involve a husband? Does it necessarily involve a career? Does it necessarily involve a family? All of those things are good, and none of those things are wrong, but I'd say that it's a deeper thing than this.

And when you get to an older stage of life, what an awful thing it would be to look back and say, if only I'd such and such. So fruit is a very, very, very important thing for us human beings. God made us with the capacity to be fruitful, and he's put it in our hearts that we really want to be fruitful.

You know, it's not just, you know, an evolutionary mantra would be survival of the fittest. But actually human beings are not that interested in survival.

[1:16] We are interested in being fruitful. Just surviving is a frustrating thing. Okay. We look back in the Old Testament, and we had a wonderful reading which exemplified this.

In the Old Testament, Israel is thought of as being a vine, a fruit-bearing plant.

And thank you so much for reading that to us, Julia. You shed a tear, and it deserved a tear. I don't know whether the tear was directly connected with the subject matter, but it was absolutely right, because it's a heart-rending psalm, that's Psalm 80, that God has prepared a people, he's saved a people, and yet the vine is not being fruitful, and the vine is being attacked.

And I think we would, if you want to put it in a very crude way, the vine is a failure. And what a fascinating psalm, because it looks forward to restoration of the vine.

Did you notice in verse 15, just look at it, Psalm 80, verse 15, that the subject matter seamlessly morphs from vine to sun.

[2:45] Did you notice that? Verse 15, watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the sun you have raised up for yourself. I'm sure our Lord Jesus would have meditated on that psalm, because the psalm itself says that the true identity of the vine is the sun.

And I think you have the same thing later, don't you? Verse 16, your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire. At your rebuke, your people perish.

Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand. The son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you.

Revive us, and we will call on your name. It's a fascinating sort of morphs over into the idea of the son of man being the vine, and the restoration of the whole thought of the vine being linked up with the son of man.

Now, I haven't done enough homework on the psalm to say much more than that, but this is rather a fascinating sort of glimpse of the future, isn't it? And I'm sure the Lord Jesus had that in mind.

[3:57] There are a number of references to the Old Testament vine, but as far as I can see, they all lament the fruitlessness of that vine.

So he said this morning that Jesus totally agrees with the idea of fruit and the desire to be fruitful, but he says, and this is the bottom line, the answer is him.

Sort of pure and simple, he says, if you want to be fruitful, remain in me. And we thought this morning that that is both incredibly simple and incredibly challenging.

I think it's a great comfort if you look back on your life and say, what have I achieved? And if the answer is, every day I prayed, I thought about God's word, I committed my way to the Lord. I might have not done it perfectly, but I did do it in a heartfelt way. I might have had some off days and some blips, but basically that's what I did with my life. Then Jesus will say, whatever anybody else says, as far as I'm concerned, that's fruitful.

[5:14] I think that's a great encouragement for us. We don't have to earn a million dollars, but we do just have to walk with the Lord. And he will ensure that it's fruitful.

As I say, I'd like us to look together at verses 9 to 17. And my thought about this passage is that it was like a sliding block puzzle.

Did you ever have sliding block puzzles? You used to get them from Woolworths. Does anybody remember Woolworths? Little plastic bits and you could slide them around and it would be, you know, say numbered tiles in order.

And then they were jumbled up and you had to get them back in order again or whatever. Or a picture. And you had to slide it around so that the nose was next to the eyes or the chin, whatever. Like that. And I think, this is the nearest I can get to it, that Jesus is taking some themes and sort of sliding them around and putting them next to each other and then putting them backwards and then connecting this one in and so on and so on.

[6:31] And the themes, it seems to me, are the theme of, is that up on the screen? Yeah. Vine, branches, abiding, and fruit.

They're the basic themes. And he connects them in different orders. So I've put here some of the different orders.

So you could connect one and two. You could connect three and four. You could connect two with three. And the Father. You could connect three with the Word and three with prayer and three with love.

And so on. So would you like, I'm going to have to do a technological twizzle around with this.

Would you like to just read through to yourself or perhaps with the person next to you the first few verses and just see, is that right?

Does he connect them in different ways? Just have a look at that for a couple of minutes. Do it with your next door neighbor and see whether you think that that's fair. So this is, so chapter 15, verses 1 to 8.

[7:41] See whether you agree with my thought on that. And I need to change the program on this for the next bit. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. A connection between one and two, the vine and the branches. Anything that Jesus references to do with, anything at all to do with vine and branches.

Pardon? That's the vine. Okay. Which says? I am the vine, you are the branches. Okay, so the vine is Jesus and we are the branches.

[10:02] Thank you very much. And what does Jesus say about the relationship between the vine and the branch? Oh, so, so, so, so, so that should, it should say disciples, shouldn't it?

Okay. Has it gone? Oh, right. And, um, how annoying.

I don't know what to do about that. Let, uh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Is that, is it on the screen if I'm there?

Okay. I'll just try and write in this bit.

Okay. Has anybody told us any, anything else about vine and branches that Jesus says? What, what, what does he say about vine and branches? What's his point about vine and branches? If the man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Okay. So what's that, how does that relate to vine and branches? Because he is the vine and we are the branches. So we're connected. Connected.

[11:15] Yeah. I think that that's his, his big point. There has to be a connection. Thank you for that, Julia. Super. Okay. Let's do three and four between branches and abiding.

Is there any connection between that? Does Jesus reference three and four branches and abiding? Of course, the answer is yes. Somebody give us a, a verse that first four, which says.

Yeah. Okay. So abiding, remaining. So there's a necessity, isn't there? Can I write necessity while I'm talking? Maybe I can.

There's a necessity of remaining. So therefore, you must abide.

Okay. Thank you very much. What about the father? Could, what does Jesus say about the father in this? He's the gardener.

[12:18] He's the gardener. He's the gardener. Yes, that's right. So, he's the gardener. And what does the gardener do?

He prunes. He prunes. So one thing is that he prunes. Now, after this morning, Daniel said he knew about pruning vines from Italy.

And what did he tell me? He told me something about it. Oh, I know what he said. That you, the grapes need the sunshine in order to grow.

So you cut away the bits that shade the grapes from the sunshine so that they can grow better. Did you see Monty Don on his gardening program on Friday?

Okay. He had been given some, I'd never, I'd hardly ever watched this, but he'd been given some little scissors. Yeah, and they were for cutting, they were tiny little scissors, like you might need to cut your nails with or something.

[13:28] And they're for cutting off some of the grapes so that the other ones could get the sun and grow bigger. So the father prunes. And that whole thought of our lives being pruned is a very helpful explanation of why we sometimes have hardships.

That it's the Lord cutting things away so we can get more sunshine in and be more fruitful. What else does the father do apart from pruning? He does.

He cuts off. And what does he cut off? Fruitless branches. Fruitless branches, yes.

Now that seems to me to be a frightening thing. Because you sort of expect Jesus to be saying lots of comforting words that nobody could be offended by.

But he doesn't actually. This is very offensive. If you're not producing fruit, rather than Jesus saying it doesn't really matter, he says you get cut off.

[14:33] Which is really very stark, isn't it? But that's what it says. So there we are. And the father does this. And I can't help thinking that in the context that would have been very relevant to the nation of Israel.

Which Jesus had come to, certainly in the, as he comes to Jerusalem on that last, those last few days. He looks for fruit on the fig tree.

And he tells a parable, doesn't he? About the lack of fruit. Okay. So the father cuts off what's fruitless.

Anything that connects number three and the word? The three is the abiding. Any sentence that connects those two? Verse seven.

Thank you. If you remain in me and my words remain in you. So the, it's almost like two things, two ways of saying the same thing.

[15:41] I abide, if you, let me get it right. If you remain in me, you remain, and my words remain in you. So there's a remaining thing about God's word.

Would anybody give us a good suggestion as to how we might ensure that the word of Jesus abides in us?

Any practical suggestion? Thank you very much. Read the Bible every day. That's not a bad suggestion, is it? I know not everybody can read.

And in the course of church history, not everybody has had a Bible. That's a relatively modern thing. But if we can read, and if we do have a Bible, then reading the Bible every day is not a bad way of doing that, is it?

It makes a lot of sense. Jesus says it's pretty essential. Anything that connects number three and prayer? Yeah, verse seven, same thing.

[16:49] If you remain in me, my words remain in you. Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. So there's another connection there. Would anybody like to make a practical suggestion on how we could put that into operation?

Nobody's got any idea how to do this. I find that, well, that's a good idea, isn't it? You could pray. You could read your Bible every day, and you could pray every day, couldn't you? That wouldn't be a bad thought.

Okay, so there's a promise given to prayer, which is a really brilliant promise. And is there anything that links number three and love?

So the thought of abiding, or remaining, and love. Is there anything? You have to go beyond verse eight to get this one.

Nine. Remain in my love. Abide in my love. Okay, well, that brings us on to the bit where we're going to go to. So that was really just sort of reminding us of the rather beautiful intertwining of these thoughts in the first verses.

[18:13] And it is beautiful, isn't it? It's in some ways very simple, but in other ways just beautiful. And you think, yeah, I would like that.

So there it is. Let's go to the next bit. Now, what I would like to suggest, and I've thought about this quite a bit, but I haven't really come to a very good conclusion on it, that the picture of the vine, which is in the first eight verses, so that's that picture, is the same picture as we get in verses nine to 17, but put in a different way.

So this is a picture about connections. And I'm so pleased, Julia, that you used that word right at the beginning.

It's to do with, that says connection. Okay? Connection. Then the same idea is put in terms of a region.

That's what I think. You can tell me whether you think it's helpful or not. So here is a region. Now, you can't see me waving that, can you? So here is a region to be in.

[19:39] That was about being connected. This is about staying in a certain area. I'll see if I can make that a little bit clearer in a minute. So here are people who are in this area.

They're staying in the area. They're remaining in this area. And we can talk about what happens in that area as we go through. So let's see if we can just tease out a little bit about the verses.

And that's all we're going to do is just be a little bit. So verse nine. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. Just as I have obeyed or kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

So let's stop on those verses for a minute. I think this tells us something about the Father and the Son in the past and in the present.

[20:53] Anybody like to suggest whether you can see anything like that in those verses that we read. Father and Son. Anything that it says about the past.

So you would be looking for a verb in the past. Father has loved me. Say that again. Father has loved me.

Yeah, thank you. As the Father has loved me. So as far as I can see, that's past tense. So that's something that doesn't depend on anything in the future.

It's past. The sort of given love. The Father has loved me. So I'm going to say that there's a sort, that's a sort of given love.

Is there anything, now you've got that one, is there anything in the present tense? Similar sort of thing. I may be stretching this a little bit actually.

[22:03] Now I look at it. Yeah, remaining in the love. So that's a present thing. And how does Jesus, what does Jesus do in order to remain in the Father's love?

Is that right? Is that what it says? Yeah, yeah. It isn't quite the same as present, is it? But I think it's getting that way.

So this is a love which follows on from something. He obeys the Father's commands and therefore remains in the Father's love.

So what shall I put here? If I put here continuing obedience, would that be okay?

Was that a fair description? Because I think what Jesus is saying is that here is the Father, for him, it's like this. Here is the Father's love and as he walks, he remains always in the Father's love.

[23:22] He doesn't go outside the Father's love. He remains in the Father's love and he does that by not something he did in the past, but something he continues to do to walk in obedience.

Is that fair enough? So it's rather mysterious because it gives you sort of a two dimension, at least two dimensions to the love of the Son, sorry, the love of the Father for the Son. So let's take that on. How does this relate to I put it the other way around now? The Son and the Father and the disciples and the Son.

So same verses. So now we're thinking disciples and Son. I'm not quite sure why I put Son and Father, but anybody got any ideas on how this now, now he speaks of the disciples in the same sort of way.

Have a look, see what you think. Ask your neighbour. So where I'm going to is the disciples, really.

[24:46] Is it, are you talking about the fact that we are to mirror Jesus in his relationship with his Father?

We will then mirror that with him and that we will remain in that as well. Yeah, I am, I think that's exactly the thought here. There's a sort of mirror of how the Son is with his Father and how we are with the Son.

So the Son to his Father obeys or keeps his commandments and therefore walks in this region of love.

And he says that we as disciples are similarly to walk in obedience to the Son. Is that correct?

As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. So the sort of givenness about that. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love.

[25:58] Just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. So in other words Jesus is saying here's a region. Think of it as a region of love.

And here's you. Oh dear. And as you walk make sure you don't go outside here but remain within the things I've commanded.

That's what he says. Let's look, let's take it on a little bit further. So we got to verse 10.

There's lots of things going on in these verses. It's a bit difficult to sort of pull them all in but we'll see what we can do. Verse 11. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete or filled up.

My command is this love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this than he lay down his life for his friends.

[27:07] You are my friends if you do what I command. 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 heard from my father I have made known to you.

So let's stop at that point there. Let's do the friends bit. Now then would anybody like to teach I think actually although I put two I think there are three things that he says in connection with the idea of friends.

Anybody like to offer us one of those or what do they say about friends? Thank you. See I didn't put that in I should have done that was very silly not to do that.

So lay down life. He lays down his life for his friends.

That's the fundamental thing. He lays down his life for his friends. Yes.

[28:23] Thank you. Yeah he does. He says I call you my friends if you do what I command. So let's put that let's change that one to obey.

So this is a very interesting definition of friends. I mean you you've got friends but you probably haven't laid down your life for your friends. And you probably think twice before doing so.

And you have friends but you wouldn't define somebody as a friend if they did everything you told them to. In fact if you have kids at school and the kid comes home and says I'm such and such a person's friend.

You say oh yes. And they said he told me to go and steal some sweets from the shop and I did it.

You think that's not much of a friend. Telling you to you know you don't have to do everything other people tell you.

You know you say that to your kids wouldn't you. But Jesus is saying this is my definition of friends you are my friends if you do what I command. So we're back to this circle really.

[29:33] But he also said about a servant doesn't know his mind as business. Yeah. So the fact that he's been part of that knowledge and that we're all about the same business.

Thank you. Yes. I think what I should just point out is a little caution that this is originally spoken to the apostles.

So we shouldn't just unthinkingly say that everything is said is immediately for us. Because there are some things obviously very much to do with the apostles.

And this is one of them. That Jesus says I have communicated everything I heard from the father. This is verse 15.

Everything I heard from the father I have communicated to you. So that's about the gospel. It's about communicating to them all the revelation of the gospel.

[30:34] And what's it contrasted with? Thank you. So I haven't left myself room on here to do that.

a bit. But if you were to think of the difference. Can you see that line? No I can't. From servants to friends.

Maybe he's saying that in Old Testament they didn't really know what the full plan of God was. It was sort of seen from a distance.

And even Abraham didn't know fully. And the angels longed to look into things. And there were mysteries that only now are revealed. But now we've come to the point in the New Testament where the full deal is explained.

And the full gospel is known. And so Jesus says I now call you friends. Because you're not sort of blindly doing what I say without really knowing what it's all about.

[31:39] but you do know. And that's a remarkable thing. So the things about friends. I lay down my life for the friends. It reminded me of laying down the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

This is why my father loves me says Jesus because I lay down my life only to take it up again. And that's why I chose those songs about Christ's sacrifice.

Because that's so powerful and poignant isn't it? That he loved us so much as to lay down his life for us. The shepherd king who dies for the sheep.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. Although he was innocent of crime. He was pierced for our transgressions. So wonderful thing there about friends.

But we're still in this circle of obedience. So this circle will come to those bits in a minute. Let's look at the last few verses which have got several themes going on in them.

[32:46] Verse 16 You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit fruit that will last and the father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

these are my commands or this is my command love each other. Anybody like to tell us some of the themes that are going on there as if I hadn't already written them up on the screen.

So what are some of the themes going on in those last few verses? too much to ask at half past seven. You could say that he's speaking to his disciples and he said you haven't chosen you but I chose you.

that's true. The whole thing of the choice of the saviour. Where does that come from? It just seems to come out of nowhere doesn't it? But it does link with, what does the choice link with very clearly? Bearing fruit. There's a very strong connection there. You get the same thing at the beginning of Ephesians don't you? that we were elect to be holy and blameless in his sight.

[34:06] So the choice which God makes is for a purpose of people being holy of people being fruitful so that's a very clear link there.

Thank you very much. Anything else that is referred to in those last few verses? Prayer.

It keeps on popping up doesn't it? Again that seems to pop up out of nowhere. It doesn't even say then it just says and the father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

So that reference to the life of prayer fruit we've had. And there's one thing that I didn't put up there on the screen so you have to look into the text to see this.

What's the other thing? Love. Yeah. Now isn't that a remarkable set of ingredients that Jesus sort of just binds them together like somebody weaving a cord with the different strands and he says this is the thing.

[35:11] So we could now do this because I said what is this region about and I put some starters here. So my thought if you remember was that the vine thing is about a connection but these next few verses are about a region or a place if you like and it's really saying the same thing in a different way.

So could we do this? It's a region of something beginning with L that he's mentioned several times. Love. It's a region of something beginning with O-B.

Obedience. Sorry about the writing. Did that more or less come up? It's just gone off the edge hasn't it? Sorry about that. It's a region of and this one only comes up once.

Joy. He uses another word along with the joy. Yeah fulfilled.

Anybody remember another place where you get that same sort of phraseology. Da da da da da da that our joy may be full.

[36:42] Beginning of 1 John isn't it? I write these. Do you want to have a look? I write these things to you that our joy or your joy may be joy.

Thank you. 1 John chapter 1 4.

We write this to make our joy complete. Now I haven't been able to think that through but I think it's just worth pointing out that Jesus says at the heart of all this is joy.

So I remember in Lord of the Rings you might think this is a very unworthy illustration Gandalf at some point do you know Lord of the Rings?

Gandalf was the wizard in Lord of the Rings and at one point he is seen to be rejoicing and oh dear I wish I hadn't started this now but he he got this little insight into the fact that the world of being a wizard in Lord of the Rings is not all balrogs and you shall not pass and conflict but there's a deep sort of well-being in his heart that illustration doesn't really help at all but I think you've got this that Jesus at some there's little points where he rejoices greatly and here is one of those points where he says you know life's tough there's pruning and sacrifice and laying down of life but actually right underneath that it's all okay it will be all okay the battle's won you know

[38:47] God is to be praised because it's all brilliant and there's a joy there and he says if you're walking in this circle you'll pick up something of this I think that's probably all I can say for that this circle also contains something that I put S-A-C sacrifice because this is the circle in which the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and he says as I have loved you so you love one another so that same sort of sacrificial love colours the love of the brotherhood of Christians and then I put one here E-D-U-C might not be quite the right word but it's okay educate educate because one of the things that

Jesus is going to say in John 17 is all the things that you need to know for the gospel I've communicated and Jesus is going to say to his apostles this is one of the tasks the father gave me to communicate everything that you need to know everything about God about his way of salvation all of that I've communicated it fully that's why Paul can say I told you the whole counsel of God there isn't anything that some guy can come along later and say ah but he never told you this this is really important this is much better than what Paul said so when the there's the Mormons have the the brass plates anybody know anything about Mormons I know very little about yes written by the angel Moroni or something like that and they say you Christians are okay but what you don't have is the brass plates with all the stuff that we've got and you need that and we say to them yaboo sucks because

Jesus communicated to his apostles everything and to think that there's anything else that he didn't communicate is an insult to Jesus competence because he says everything I communicated and six it's a sphere or a region in which there is SOV sovereignty now then can I spell that sovereignty so there's this little reference it's all done not on your cleverness but on my choice says Jesus and I put one more thing in this realm PR prayer that's what I had in mind prayer okay let me look at what my squiggly writing did oh that's not very beautiful is it but the thoughts are brilliant

I think it's a wonderful sort of all encompassing description of what it is to live the Christian life and walk the Christian walk it's walking in this area and staying there the place of God's love the place of obeying Christ's words the place where there is joy filled up joy fulfilled a place where life is laid down for others a place where we have the full revelation of everything God wants us to know a place where God is sovereign and he chooses and it's a place where prayer is answered and you

mix all those things up together that's how we live isn't it that's the Christian life that's us well I'll stop there oh does anybody want to ask anything anybody want to query or observe