

Remain in the vine

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[0:00] Good morning. Let me add my welcome to Shammaz. If we've not met before, my name is Daniel. The privilege of being one of the elders here. Before we get into the sermon this morning, just to explain what's going on, just in case you're not quite sure what is going on.

The last few weeks, last few months, we've been in the Book of Acts together, but this morning we're just taking a little break. We will be in it next Sunday when Courtney Smith comes and preaches, but for this Sunday and the two Sundays after that, we're taking a short break and looking at this subject of growing in Christ.

As believers together, as Christians who find that our lives are in Christ, we want to be growing. We want to be going forwards in the Christian life. And so as elders, when we're thinking about what to preach on, we thought that something like this is where we should go.

So thankful to Jerome and Phil and chats I've had with them and a couple of books, which perhaps I'll recommend to you as the weeks go on, that have inspired shaping this series.

We've had two readings. The first reading we'll start in Isaiah chapter 5, but we'll spend most of our time in John chapter 15.

[1:28] So you may want to have a finger in both. But as we think particularly just briefly about Isaiah chapter 5, imagine that your job is a vine dresser.

You have a vine, this plant that grows grapes, and you want to use those grapes for good. Perhaps you'll make some nice wine with them.

And so you spend time daily watering, caring, tending your plants. At times in the year, you will prune your plant, cut it back, cultivate it, in order for it to produce good, healthy fruits.

But as you tend your vine, as you work hard, looking after this plant, you're just finding you're not having much success.

It's not growing very strong. The fruit that's coming off it is horrible. It's not going to work for producing nice wine or nice grapes to eat.

[2:35] The fruit's foul. It's smelly. It's horrible. But you keep working. You keep trying over years and years, and eventually you have to come to a day where you decide enough's enough.

I can't go on looking after this vine. It's fruitless, pointless work. Well, that's the story of Isaiah chapter 5, 1 to 7.

And it's a bit of a love song, really. Not a love song between two people who are madly in love with each other, but very much a one-way love.

This is a song from the Lord Almighty about His people. Verse 7, the vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel.

It's about the Lord and His people. And the Lord sings about His love for His people, His vineyard, who He has cared for lovingly and carefully, who He took out of Egypt and planted them in their own lands.

[3:54] But could He find good grapes amongst them? Well, verse 4 says no. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?

When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? He couldn't find good grapes on this vine. What did He want to see in these people? Well, chapter 5, verse 7. Towards the end, He looked for justice amongst His people, but saw bloodshed.

He looked for righteousness, but heard cries of distress. He saw just a people who had wandered far from Him who weren't being holy as He is holy.

They had not borne fruit in that way. And so He needs to tear down and start again. Another passage which we haven't read this morning, but we could have turned to, is Psalm 80.

[5:13] And a couple of verses from there to share with you. We're told this, This vine, the vine of God's people, He's cutting down and He's going to start again with the man at His right hand.

But who is that son of man? Who is that new and true vine for His people?

Who is that? Well, that's where we need to go to John 15, isn't it? John 15, that's where we're going to spend the rest of our time.

And Jesus, He stands up and says, I am the true vine.

And perhaps those words from Isaiah or Psalm 80 might have been going round people's heads as He says those words, I am the true vine.

[6:38] It seems to me that this passage is about connection. We live in a very connected age, don't we?

More so than any other point of history. Most of us, if not all of us in this room, will have a phone.

And more than likely, it's a bit like my phone, it's a smartphone.

We're connected on it. At the tap of a button, we can instantly talk to friends. At the tap of a button, we can very quickly find out what is going on in the world around us.

But for our phones to work, it requires them to have batteries that are charged.

And so they need to be themselves connected into the power. If not, we'll run out of battery, the phone will become lifeless, and if we refuse to plug them in, they're going to be no good at all.

[7:48] They're dead and useless. And this passage shows us that that's the same for the Christian life. From the moment we come to find Jesus as our Savior, we find we're connected to the source of life.

The true vine, the plant that gives life. As he says there in verse 5, I am the true vine, you are the branches.

We're connected as branches to the vine, to the life source. And we need to stay connected.

We need to remain there. This passage, I think, is a helpful passage to picture our union with Christ.

As we think that we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection. We're united with him and the life that he has.

[8:58] And we've got that wonderful picture of him being the vine, and we're the branches. We're connected. We're united to Jesus. Jesus says elsewhere that he's the life.

He says here he's the true vine. We think of life and the plant. But he says in other places he's the life. He says I'm the way, the truth, and the life. In another place he says I am the resurrection and the life.

He says elsewhere I'm the bread of life. Do we get it? Jesus is the life. And Jesus here he says I'm the true vine.

In me is life. And in me I am able to do what the people of God failed to do in the Old Testament. I am acting justly and I am all righteousness. And so as we find our life in Jesus, we find that his righteousness becomes ours.

[10:09] It's a precious thing to find that our life is in Jesus. We're united to him. Verse 4 tells us more words, more things about the vine.

Jesus says we must remain in the vine. Remain in me as I also 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. Jesus says remain in me.

Or as other versions, maybe a version you've got yourself this morning, says abide in me. In Jesus, in other words, in Jesus you can find in him your abiding, your staying place.

You can find in him your home. As many of you know, over the last few weeks, my wife Becky and I have been moving from one place to another.

[11:23] And it's a good move. It's a necessary move for us. But it's one that can feel overwhelming and stressful as anybody that's moved in any sort of form will know.

Will you move from a place that's familiar, that you've called home, to a place that's unfamiliar and you've got to call home even though it doesn't quite feel like home yet.

As many people say, moving is one of the most stressful things you can do. But it's a comfort to me this week to read that Jesus says remain in me.

It's good news for our spiritual lives that once we find our life in Jesus, there is no need to move.

There is no need to find Jesus as our savior and then a few years to pack up our boxes and move on to the next idea or the next religion.

No, in Jesus we find a resting place, a place to stay. And that's humbling.

[12:31] That's humbling to think that the Lord Jesus Christ says to his people, come to me and remain in me. It's humbling because I don't know about you, but I look at my life and I look at the mess that I am.

I look at the sin of the past and of the present and I'm aware of the temptations. I'm aware of the failures. I'm aware of the doubts.

And Jesus says, it's okay. You can remain in me. It's humbling and it's awesome news.

This is the Lord of all. The one who spoke creation into being. It's awesome news.

If we get to remain in Jesus, why would we go elsewhere? Who can satisfy our soul's longings more than Jesus?

[13:34] Who has compassion like Jesus for the sinner? Who else would listen to us 24 hours, 7 days a week, 365 days like Jesus?

Who else would lay down his life for us but Jesus? Who else would offer grace so freely to us without money than Jesus?

Who else would die for those who were once his enemies? Who else could we want but Jesus?

And so this is awesome news this morning.

Awesome and humbling news that Jesus says to us, remain in me. Find your home in me. Not only do we find in Jesus a home but we find that he makes his home with us.

Verse 4, remain in me as I also remain in you. Perhaps we can understand that a little bit more if we turn over the page, a page before to chapter 14, verse 23, where Jesus says, and in this he's sort of speaking about the spirit really.

[14:58] He says, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My father will love them and we will come to make our home with them. Jesus says, you find a home in me but I find a home in you as well.

He's living within us by his spirit. So we're united to Christ.

But this passage is also, it's not just about union with Christ, it's also about communion with Christ.

We're united with Christ but we also need to keep that relationship with him going.

We need to commune with him. It's no good saying I'm a Christian and just moving on from that.

Just living our lives how we once did.

We've got to remain in it. Otherwise we've become like that phone, out of battery, out of charge and dead and lifeless.

[16:09] We want to keep our life founded and grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to stay connected to him. And that's where our focus is going to be for the rest of this sermon and for the next few sermons.

As we think about growing in Christ, growing our communion, our relationship with him. So we've got four points for you this morning. Firstly, growing can be painful.

Well, we want to grow in Christ. Well, know that it can be painful. Verse 1 and 2. I'm the true vine and my father is the gardener.

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.

Our heavenly father makes sure that he looks after those who find their life in his son, the true vine.

[17:22] And he wants to see branches connected to him, to the vine. He wants to see them bearing fruit. Now, I'm not a gardener, so I apologize if I've got this a little bit wrong.

But my understanding that if you want a plant to bear fruit, to grow fruit, you've got to prune it back. And I think this is a good picture of what it means to prune.

It's sort of a before, and then the pruning happens, and it looks like that. It's cut right, right back. It's a pretty brutal process. If it was me doing it, I would have just cut a few little snippets around the

edges.

But this is proper pruning. And as branches connected to Christ, if we're going to grow in him, it will mean we've got to be pruned.

It will mean we're going to be cut back at times, in order that better, more wonderful growth will happen for the next season of our lives. But cutting isn't going to be pleasant.

[18:38] And that may mean we'll suffer in one way or another. Growing can be painful. I know that I have experienced many times of cutting, of growing, and know that it's painful.

And look out here and know that many of us here can say, yeah, we've experienced or we are experiencing times of suffering, of that pruning, of that cutting.

But then we look back on those times and see how the Lord has worked. Something that was a big part of my life growing up, not just as a Christian, but just growing up in general, was as I was living at home as a teenager.

And things felt pretty stable. I had a mom and dad and brother at home. We felt pretty content with how life was. But suddenly, the family life was turned upside down.

One April Tuesday morning, when mom left home. And so as a 14-year-old boy, that just changed everything. And yet, even in such a time of testing and hardship, I look back on that as one of the more significant times that God used to grow and develop my faith in Him.

[20:11] I began to get into the Bible for myself and grow in my prayer life. The cutting was painful, but the growth was fruitful.

And for all of us, when we go through suffering of various kinds, whatever it might be, perhaps we can ask ourselves, what is God showing to me here of my sin?

What is God teaching me about Him here? The cutting is painful, but the growth is fruitful.

Growing can be painful. Secondly, growing will lead to fruitfulness. Eight times in this passage, Jesus speaks about bearing fruit, a significant part of this passage.

And it fits very nicely into us thinking about growing in Christ, growing fruit. That's what we want to see amongst Christians. That's what we want to see amongst Christians coming to Calvary Church.

[21:25] We want to see people growing, bearing fruit, as they're living in Christ, connected to the vine. But what is the fruit?

My immediate thought was to think of the fruit of the Spirit that we're told about in Galatians chapter 5. Their love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

That's the sort of fruit that we're to think of. And Jesus specifically mentions to us three fruits.

Firstly, the fruit of love. He says much about love in this passage. In fact, so He talks about bearing fruit eight times.

He talks about love seven times between verses 9 to 17. Have a look there in verse 12. He says, My command is this.

[22:32] Love each other as I have loved you. He tells us love each other. He tells us to bear fruit and He tells us to love each other.

And what does this love of Jesus look like? Well, verse 13 shows us Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends.

The love of Jesus is the example to us. And we see His love displayed most supremely as He lays down His life for us.

And we're to follow in His example. And that may mean our love that we show to others feels costly. Some people will find easy to love. But others can feel tricky to love. Maybe they just irritate us.

[23:30] There's a person and you think that they just irritate you. Or they just feel so different from us and it's hard to love them. But the command here is to love.

And that we're told to bear fruit. And one of those fruit we should be pairing is love. And so Jesus says love.

Perhaps one of the most stark illustrations of the fruit of love in a believer, other than looking at the Lord Jesus, is found in the story of Corrie ten Boom.

The ten Boom family were arrested by Nazis in World War II. For hiding Jewish people in their home. Corrie and her sister Betsy were sent off to Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Betsy was killed two days before Corrie's release. A few years later, Corrie ten Boom found herself in a church in Munich.

[24:39] And she was talking there about the message of God's forgiveness. And she wrote this. I saw him, a boarding and heavyset man in a grey overcoat.

A brown felt hat clutched between his hands. He came up to her and he said, You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk.

I was a guard there. He didn't remember Corrie. He went on and said, Since that time I have become a Christian.

I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there. But I would like to hear it from your lips too. Will you forgive me?

Her mind was racing. She thought, I had to do it. I knew that I had to do it. The message that God forgives has a prior condition that we forgive those who injure us.

[25:44] It could not have been many seconds that I stood there. Hand held out. But to me it seemed like hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had to do.

As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger, which almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than our goodness that the world's healings hinge, but on his.

When he tells us love our enemies, he gives along with the command the love itself. What a wonderful way we see that love, that fruit of love working in a believer.

Love for an enemy. Love for someone who was involved in killing her own sister. But she knew that the Lord Jesus has loved her and forgiven her for her sin.

[27:08] And he surely was working by his spirit to produce that love within her in order to enable her to forgive. Fruit of love. Fruit of love. Fruit of love.

Other fruit that Jesus mentions here, verse 11, we see joy. He tells us this. He says, so that my joy may be in you and so that your joy may be complete.

This joy comes from finding finding our abiding place in Jesus. That's what he's been speaking about.

And the reason why we can know real joy, even in the midst of deep suffering, even when we're being cut back, even when we're being cut back, pruned, is because we can sing that Jesus is ours, because we know that he is our abiding place.

Because as we sang earlier, it's in Christ alone that our hope is found, that he is my light, my strength, and my song.

[28:18] He is my cornerstone and my solid ground amidst all the shaky ground that we find all around us in life on earth.

Those words were particularly precious to me during those years when our family was getting used to mum not being there anymore.

Knowing that though family life seems messy, in Jesus, he is my cornerstone and my solid ground.

And so we can know joy. Joy because we know life in the Son of God. And another fruit that Jesus mentions just before this passage, actually, just sneaking it in there, 1427, he talks about peace.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

[29:29] And do not be afraid. Peace. The fruit of peace. Peace not as the world gives. Not in doing an hour of yoga or meditation or something.

Not peace in our material blessings. But peace in knowing our sin forgiven and a restored relationship with God.

J.C. Ryle, former bishop of Liverpool, commentates on this passage and says, peace is Christ's peculiar gift to his people.

He seldom gives them money or worldly ease or temporal prosperity. These are very best, questionable possessions. They're temporary. They often do more harm than good to the soul.

They act as clogs and weights to our spiritual lives. Inward peace of conscience, arising from a sense of pardon, sin, and reconciliation with God is a far greater blessing.

[30:34] This peace is the inheritance of all believers with a high or low, rich or poor. Without distinction, whatever circumstances his children are in, we can know this peace, not as the world gives, but as Christ gives.

Our sins forgiven, a restored relationship with God. So growing can be painful, but growing will lead to fruitfulness.

Growing also involves listening and obeying. verse 3, Jesus speaks of his words. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

And verse 7, if you remain in me and my words remain in you. He speaks about his words, about his words, which have been at work in us if we've come to find our connection in the vine and which need to continue to be worked, at work in us as we grow, as we seek our relationship with him to grow as we commune with the Lord Jesus who we united to.

And so an encouragement for us that we need to keep coming to Jesus' words. We need to keep coming and gathering together in this place week by week to hear the word of God read and preached.

[32:18] Morning and if we can in the evening to hear God speak to us his life-giving words. His words which will help us to remain and stay connected to the vine.

But surely an hour or two in the week, one day a week is not enough. It's become a precious and wonderful habit for many of us to be reading the Bible day by day, to be sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his voice.

And so we need to get in that habit if we can. But I know that throughout my Christian journey there's been times and seasons where I haven't read the word day by day.

Don't let that make you feel guilty. We're not commanded to. But at the same time as a branch connected to the vine, surely we should think this is a good thing for me to keep hearing the Lord Jesus and his voice.

But just listening, just hearing the words on the page aren't enough. Jesus says we need to obey.

[33:48] Verse 9, As the Father has loved me so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love just as I have kept my Father's command and remain in his love.

It could appear if we had just read those words in isolation that if we don't obey the word then we're not going to be loved by God.

But I think that would completely contradict the gospel message we're freely and lavishly loved children of God. There's nothing we have done which earns that.

But the more that we see and hear his words, the more that we should see the goodness of them. The more that we, the Spirit is working the fruit in us, the more we'll see the rightness and importance of being obedient to what God's word tells us to do.

And it's a wonderful thing. It's a wonderful joy to hear God's words and do them. It's a wonderful psalm.

[35:03] We're not going to read it but just share some highlights from it. Psalm 19. Perhaps you want to go away and read that later. Which helps us to see the wonderful beauty of the words of God.

It tells us the law of the Lord is perfect. It refreshes the soul. You want to be refreshed? Turn to the word of God. The commands of the Lord they're radiant and they give light to the eyes as we see God's way of light of blessing.

The words of God are more precious than gold and they're sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. By the words of God we're warned.

By them we see our sin. We call out for forgiveness. By them we're taught and we're trained in righteous, holy, living, living as people who are growing branches connected to the vine, connected to Christ.

So growing involves listening to the word and obeying. And finally, growing involves praying, just briefly. So we're to listen to the word but we're also to speak.

[36:28] We can be in communication, full communication communication with Christ. If you think about the way our relationships grow, they're going to grow with one another as we listen to others and as we speak to others

and that's no different with our relationship with Christ.

And in verse 7 and 16, I think Jesus sort of just seems to assume we'll ask, we'll speak to him.

Verse 7, verse 16, you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you may go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you.

He encourages us, He invites us as people that find our home in Him and He in us to speak to Him and to ask Him of things.

Perhaps your ears pricked up as maybe it will have done myself years ago and think, oh well, I can ask for that shiny new car or that six bedroom dream house in the country but I don't think that that's what the Lord Jesus is saying here.

I think as we're so connected to the Lord Jesus, we begin to learn and grow an understanding of His ways and we begin to desire the things that He desires.

[38:06] He goes on to say in verse 7 this, so He says, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. this is to my Father's glory that you may bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples.

A desire that He has for us, for us as branches connected to the vine is that we will bear fruit and so perhaps that can shape our prayers.

Perhaps we can pray, Lord, grow me in fruitfulness. Lord, help me to be obedient to your words.

Lord, help me to love like Jesus loves.

His desires become our desires and we'll ask Him for them. and so this is what we learn from this passage as we think about growing in Christ.

Growing involves pruning. It's going to hurt at times. A growing will see fruitfulness. we thought about love, joy, peace.

[39:23] We'll see that growing in our hearts. Growing involves listening to the word and obeying and growing involves praying, speaking, asking and in all this we have the help of the vine himself, of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. We're not on our own. We don't have to struggle on our own to grow in Christ.

No, we have the source of life himself and so take encouragement from that. We've heard some big things.

Perhaps we've heard some things that hurt. Maybe God is using this to cut us back a little bit. We've heard some encouraging things.

[40:36] What a blessing that we find our home in Christ. Why don't we just take a few minutes of quiet now to come before the Lord, but just between ourselves and the Lord.

Perhaps there's one thing you want to say, Lord, help me with this, or Lord, forgive me for this, and then I'll lead us in a prayer, and then we'll sing.

Thank you.

I am the vine.

You are the branches. If you remain in me, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. Lord God, we've had some wonderful things this morning.

[41:55] And we've had some challenging things this morning. And we confess that we are human, we are weak, we are sinful. But we thank you that we can find our lives in you.

We can find in you a home in which we can stay. Thank you for our union with Christ and how we pray that you'd help us in our communion with him.

To grow in our relationship with him. So that we would grow as strong branches bearing good fruit. So help us, Lord, we pray.

Lord, help us through this week to remember that apart from you, we can't do this. Help us to keep looking to you for the help and the strength to grow in Christ day by day.

And we ask this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing a final song before Shammar closes our time in prayer.

[43:14] A wonderful song, which is really a prayer. I pray that the...