

Abide

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[0 : 00] The slides, I don't know anything about vineyards and anything like that.! I'm preaching on I am the vine, you are the branches, but now I'm inspired.

! So it's good to be here. It's good to be worshiping with you for our partnership in the gospel. We thank God for, even though Appleton seems so far from Racine, and yet together we share a ministry in common through the work of classes and what God does there. So I'm so very thankful for that and pray, feel connected in that way to this congregation a little bit. So it's good to be here today. It's good to be worshiping our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And as you gather today, I want to ask a question that maybe is sort of captures the essence of what this passage in John is all about. Have you ever wondered, as you are living your life, have you ever wondered, is this all really true? Is this claim of Christ, is that true for me? Am I maybe really a Christian?

That might be a real practical way to say that. I ask that question because in 2008, my father passed away and as a few months before that, my dad was a solid Christian man, drug us to church all the time, all eight kids and made us go. And I always thought that, you know, he never had a doubt in his life.

I heard him talking with an elder. He had developed cancer at that time. And he was talking with an elder and he said, you know, case, sometimes I wonder if it's all true. That kind of shocked me, you know, that my dad had that moment in his life where he said, is this really true? And it was also an inspiration to me because he said shortly after that, he said, I know where that's coming from. And he says, I know it's true, but I do wonder sometime. That's why I love passages like John chapter 15 so much. And, and the book of John in general is, is wonderful for that.

Where John says at the end of his book in John 20 verse 33 said, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe and that Jesus is Messiah, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. So the book of John was written for those of us who wrestle with that question. And when we do, we can turn to John and see that we can believe and that we in believing have, life in his name so that we can go boldly through life. Uh, Jesus is indeed the son of God.

[3 : 12] So, uh, he's very selective in his book about what he includes. He does a lot with the signs and the teachings of Jesus, the miracles that reveal Jesus glory and his divinity. And, um, especially as I am statements, John is just a book that's full of Jesus saying, I am.

I am the bread of life. Uh, I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. And I am the vine and you are the branches. And, uh, it's really good for all of us because, uh, the question that we're challenged with is the same one that Jesus asked of Mary in John 11 when, uh, he said, I am the resurrection and the life. And then he asked Mary, do you believe this? So that's our question today. Before I read the passage, I would like to, to pray and ask God to, to bless the teaching of his word. Would you join me in that?

Father, here we are gathered. We are gathered here, uh, because of you. And, uh, we come today in the ordinariness of our everyday life. We come with good weeks. We come with bad things happening this week. We come with challenges and we need to turn to your word. Father, I pray that you speak to each one of us, right, where we need to be spoken to. May it begin here in this heart. Lord, they need to hear what you have to say. And so, Father, simply ask that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts may be acceptable in your sight. You are our rock and our redeemer. In your name we pray. Amen.

So, John chapter 15. Hear the word of the Lord. Jesus says, I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that does not bear fruit. While every branch in me that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear any fruit by

itself. It must remain in the vine. That word remain is abide too. And that's where I like the old word abide.

NIV has often remain. He says, you cannot bear fruit unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

[6:16] If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and it withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my word remains in you. Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. This is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples. As the father loved me, so I have loved you.

Now, abide in my love. If you keep my commands, you will abide in my love. Just as I have kept my father's commands and abide in his love. And I have told you all this so that your joy may be complete and that your, and the word of the Lord may be in you. So this is the word of the Lord for which we give thanks to God. All right. Some of you may remember those old Milwaukee beer commercials. I'm not promoting beer or anything, but that, that, that commercial, you know, the guys are, they're mountain climbing, hiking, hiking, they're going together and it's the campfire at the end of the day. And what are they saying around that campfire? It doesn't get any better than this. Really? The end of that day, it doesn't get any better than this. I'll bet you there were some wives at home that were saying the very same thing. It doesn't get any better than this. Well, Jesus is sitting around with his disciples on the night that he was betrayed. And I imagine it felt good for them to have Jesus right there with them. It didn't get any better than that for sure to have Jesus right there. When they had questions, they could ask him and he would answer when they felt troubled and lost and needed some direction.

He was there giving them directions. His teachings were fantastic and they learned a lot. They were just taking it in and it felt like they were just growing so much by what he taught. And then they also, you know, had those times where they just needed him to just be there quietly with them. I didn't get any better than that for them for sure. But now they are a little bit out of sorts because Jesus said things like, I'm going to Jerusalem to die. I'm not going to be with you much longer. I'm going to my father's house to prepare a place for you. And suddenly everything that they thought they knew was out of kilter and they didn't know anymore. They were troubled. And so Jesus calms their fears by giving metaphors that they could hold on to. And this one, I am the true vine and you are the branches.

I am the true vine as opposed to a false vine. Like I said, I don't know much about vine growing and grape growing. You know, I love grapes. I love what fruit the vines reveal or that they grow. But the imagery was very, very familiar to the Jewish people. It comes up over and over in the Bible.

Starting in the garden in Genesis. I'm not going to do a whole vine exposition. I'll just give you a couple of examples. In the Old Testament, there are time and time again, God refers to the nation of Israel as his vineyard. So the vineyard of the Lord, Isaiah 5 verse 7, the Lord Almighty is the nation. The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel. And the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but he saw bloodshed. That's one. Jeremiah is another sample of that. I planted you, O Israel, like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into corrupt wild vine? Although you wash yourself with soap and use an abundance of cleansing powder, the stain of your sin is still with me.

[11:04] How? How disappointing that is for God. He planted, nurtured, tended his people. They were to be his representatives to the whole world. They would produce good fruit, but alas, they didn't. They failed.

They only produced bad fruit and had to be cut off. That whole story of Israel as God's people is laced with evidence of how much God loved and cared for them. If you trace God's relationship with his people in the Old Testament, he chose them from eternity. He redeemed them in the book of Exodus from slavery. And he was with them through their wilderness wanderings, feeding them man and giving them everything. And then they entered into the land and he provided them with everything that they need physically, emotionally, spiritually. He provided for them. But again and again, they failed. And by contrast, Jesus is now saying, I am the true vine. Or very simply, he is the fulfillment. If you're following along in your notes that should be in your bulletins there, you can write that in. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Israel, the shadows. He succeeded where they failed. He's the perfect representation of God to the world where they were not. He would succeed where the first Adam failed.

And everyone since would fail. He would obey his father. So that's Jesus, the vine, the true vine. Now in this story of the vine and the branches, we have to look at God also. So God is the second character in this allegory. My father is the gardener. So Jesus highlights the role of God. God the father is the caretaker, the one responsible for taking care of the vineyard and making sure that the plant is healthy. And what's he doing? He's cutting off dead branches. He's pruning, watering, protecting the plant. He's the keeper. He is sovereign. He is the provider. He ensures that all the branches, in other words, all those who are a part of the true vine are healthy and bearing fruit. He goes on to say in the passage we just read in verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear fruit. We'll talk about that more a little bit later. But remember, the job of the gardener is to make sure that the branch stays healthy.

[14:03] Connecting, bearing fruit. He removes dead or unproductive branches to ensure the health and productivity of the vine. So there's a little bit of judgment there. God judges.

If we can use that metaphor, the dead fruitless branches. The imagery of cutting off unfruitful branches suggests that God is concerned to keep the vine productive, bearing fruit according to the nature of the vine, supplying its source of life, being and staying connected to Christ.

That's the analogy there. Staying connected to Christ in order to bear fruit. And I would suggest that it's referring to the life and character and teaching of Jesus Christ. When we talk about the fruit, what is the purpose of our life to bear fruit for the kingdom? Well, it's the fruit of the spirit. You could say the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. Everything that is fully embodied in Jesus Christ to perfection is now a part of our calling. That's what we're doing as Christians. We're becoming more and more like Jesus every day.

We call that process sanctification, but you can also call that it's God pruning us so that we will bear more of that. And if people should be able to look at us and not say, oh, what wonderful people you are. But when we're nailing it, they're going to say, what a wonderful savior you serve.

I want more of that. So that's what we want to represent, that Jesus Christ. So God spells this out in further detail in verse 6 of this passage. If you do not remain in me, what are you like?

[16:13] You're like a branch that is thrown away and it withers. That's judgment. That's God taking what is not productive, throwing it away. They're picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. So in Matthew 13, 24 through 26, Jesus tells a parallel parable and it's of the wheat and the weeds. And in the Matthew 13, Jesus says, the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while he was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weed among the wheat and it went away and then went away. And when the wheat sprouted and formed heads, the weeds also appeared. What a dilemma.

Some of our summers, my father grew beans and there were this plant called jimson weeds. I don't know. I can still picture them. They're hard and soft. They had like the fruit of them or like, like you could, you could like throw them at people and they would really hurt. They're like spiky.

But it got to the point where for some reason, the chemical that he was using to eliminate them didn't work and it grew in there.

And so, well, of course he had four sons. And so what are we supposed to do? And even the sisters got involved with the whole thing. We had to be out there and we'll tell stories of cutting down jimson weeds. Just piles and piles. Walking the beans, cutting all those weeds out.

[17:59] That's my connection to dead branches. They don't belong there. The weeds are there. They're growing at the same time. In this story, he says, you know what? But in every gathering of people, there are going to be wheat and there are going to be weeds.

And in this case, this dilemma, what do they do? God says, let them grow together. You know, there's, you can't always tell the wheat from the weeds sometimes, but God knows.

And there's coming a day when he will cut and separate the wheat from the weeds. The dead branches from the connected branches.

And he's going to throw the wheat into the furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Do you believe this? Are you connected to this vine?

Not only does the father judge those connected to Jesus, but he also prunes. There's a pruning process that happens. He literally cleans those who are connected to the vine.

[19:11] For those who are in Christ, those who are in the vine, it says God proves. There's a play on words going on here. For those who remain in Christ, well, first those who are cut off, the Greek word is ere.

The root word is to cut. Just cut it off. But those who remain in Christ, the Greek word is katere. Or catharsis. Or catharsis. That's where we get that word kind of a cleansing from. So that word is connected to verse 3.

You see where he says to his disciples, You are already clean. That's the same word. You are clean by the word of God in you.

So that represents God sanctifying work in the lives of the believers. He's in the process of refining and shaping and challenging us to be more like Jesus Christ.

[20 : 21] Pruning can involve trials. There's temptations that come our way. There are things that happen to us. God disciplines us at a time when we sin.

That's God working on us, pruning on us. I've heard so many testimonies about how this trial or that disappointment, this heartache or that loss has been used to grab one's attention.

But I don't think ultimately the cutting tool that God uses is those disappointments. In the very next word, that brings us back to verse 3. Where he reminds his disciples that they're already clean.

Why? Because of the word I have spoken to you. So in the gospel of John, the word is very central to his teaching. That's why the book of John starts out with, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

The word of God is Christ, living, active, capable to transform our hearts and lives. The word of God is the cutting tool that God uses to cleanse people.

[21 : 41] I love Charles Spurgeon on this. He said, The word of God is like a sharp knife. In Hebrews 4, it says, The word of God is living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, useful for cutting away to our very soul.

So here's what Charles Spurgeon says, It is the word that prunes the Christian. It is the truth that purges him. The scripture, made living and powerful by the Holy Spirit.

Effectually, it cleanses the Christian. Affliction is, he calls that the handle of the knife, but it's the word of God that cuts us.

Because, you know, the truth is, if you live long enough, I know people who are on the bed of affliction. Their health is not well. And instead of turning to God and to his word, they continue in their unbelief.

They keep shaking their fist at God. They keep saying, No, I want to do this. I want to get healthy. I want to be better. I've also known people who die peacefully, and they're still unrepentant as far as I know.

[22 : 56] I can't see the fruit. I'm not judging people, but I'm saying it's not always the afflictions, the sickness, the loss, the heartache that bring us to God.

It's the word of God. That's why it's so important, dear people, to be in the word of God. Study the word of God. Get to know the word of God. I love the song, Knowing You, Jesus, because I think that's what it's all about.

If you want to find joy, happiness, fulfillment, everything in your life, study God more. The more you study God, the less I become important in life, and then the more joy and happiness I found.

So when the good news was proclaimed at Pentecost, here's an example of it, the cutting of the heart. So they're proclaiming the word of God, Jesus Christ, living, dying, risen.

And what did the people say in Acts 2? They were cut to the heart, and they cried, What shall we do?

[24 : 04] And what did Peter say? Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Oh, that's good news. John in his first gospel makes it very clear that no one who continues to live in, abides in Jesus Christ, keeps on sinning.

There is that reality. And the flip side of that is, no one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. This was very evident, just as an illustration to this, in the chapters before, in chapter 13 of John.

What was Jesus doing there? He was washing the feet of his disciples. Remember, he came to Peter, and he was going to wash Peter's feet. He got down, and Peter said, No, no, no, no, you can't wash my feet, Lord.

He says, Well, if I don't wash you, you can have no part of me. And so then Peter said, Okay, then wash my whole body, my head, and everything.

[25 : 23] What did Jesus say to him? He said, Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet. Their whole body is clean. You are all clean.

In other words, to all the disciples, he said, You are already cleansed. You are already pruned because of your connection to me.

But not every one of you. You get the difference? Who was there, present there? It was Judas. Very close. He was in the presence of Jesus for three years.

Knew him inside out. Even did some miracles along with him. Yet he was not cleansed because he was not connected to Jesus Christ. Jesus clearly said, In Matthew 7, By their fruit, you will recognize them.

Do people pick grapes from a thorn bush or figs from a thistle? Like every good branch, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

[26 : 35] A good tree cannot bear good fruit. And a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. So you see, honestly, I can't always tell.

I look at this congregation of people and I look at you, I think, Yes, you are clean people. You look like you're in. But I can't always see what's going on to the heart.

I can't see if you're just faking it or if it's real. We have that dilemma every time people come and they want to join church and they say, I want to be a part of this church.

And I'm not sure why they want to be a part of it. They felt something there. But over time, their fruits will be known. See, and I don't always know where that is.

Sometimes you say, Wow, that was the best testimony I've ever heard when people are making profession of faith. That was good. I think Jesus is very real in their life. And other times you think like, I don't know if there's much there or not.

[27 : 38] I can't always tell. But God sees. He looks into the heart of every man, woman, boy, and girl. And he knows. He knows what's going on there.

He can tell a dead branch from a fruitful one. You can see green and fruitful for a season. But eventually, maybe not in this life, but surely on that day, you will encounter God face to face.

And God will either say, Well done. Welcome home. Or depart from me. I never knew you. So if Jesus is the true vine, the source of a fruitful life, and the Father is the gardener who tends the vine, and then, what kind of a branch are you today?

Can you know for sure that you're connected to Jesus Christ? And if you are, what's the key to living a fruitful life?

This is where this command makes sense. I usually challenge, like the boys and girls, how many times did Jesus say, remain in the vine? If you can come with an answer after that, I didn't bring my stay.

[28 : 55] I'll give you, I don't know. I won't give you anything. I'll just give you a high five. I didn't bring anything. But if you can tell me how many times that word is in this passage, good job.

Our text clearly states, that no branch can bear fruit by itself. You're not going to be able to generate this on your own. You need to have that connection with Jesus Christ.

Abide. Remain in Jesus Christ. Fruitfulness is not possible apart from Christ. Apart from Him, it says we can do nothing.

We have no life. We have no desire. That's sort of how it was. I grew up in a Christian family, but I didn't have that desire until one day I came to the end of myself.

I didn't hate God. I didn't, you know, hate the church or anything like that. I just wanted to live my life the way I wanted to live. And God said, for a season, you can do that.

[30 : 00] Then one day, He looked at me and He said, now, are you ready to submit to me? And on that day, I said, yes, Lord, I am ready to submit to you.

I couldn't do that if the Holy Spirit wasn't working on my heart. That is human nature. But thank God He doesn't cave to human nature, but He works in our heart by His great mercy.

Paul says this in Ephesians 2, you were dead in your transgressions and sin. You could say, you were a dead branch, cut and withered, thrown away, good for nothing but fire.

What were you doing? You were gratifying the cravings of your sinful nature. You were just doing what you wanted to do, when you wanted to do it, how you wanted to do it.

And you were deserving of wrath. That's a pretty sad existence, isn't it? But, Ephesians says, but by His great mercy.

[31 : 08] That's the key difference for everyone in this room. The difference between the living branches and the dead branches is that connection to Jesus Christ.

Are you connected to Him? I'm not going to go into it, but I'll make a reference to Romans 9, verse 17, where Paul talks about, well, what if you're a dead branch?

And he says, there's a process called grafting, where you take the dead branch apart from itself, it would wither and die, and you connect it to the true living source of life.

And he takes those dead stumps and grafts them into a living tree. That tree is Jesus Christ. And oh, what a life it is.

No, looking back after that, I don't regret a day. Is it easy to live the Christian life? No. But it's so possible, and it's so wonderful.

[32 : 14] I think in your handouts today, there's some benefits of being in divine. And I just gave that all to you. No, don't have to fill it in, but I invite you to take a look at that afterwards and just celebrate.

Celebrate what God's doing in your life. Is life easy? No. Is it good? Without a shadow of a doubt. Can I know that I will be a good branch and will bear fruit?

Yes, you can, says John. Yes, you can, says Jesus. What's the key? Stay connected to Jesus. If you're not connected to Jesus Christ, I would welcome you.

Talk to me, talk to one of your elders, talk to anybody here. And don't leave today without answering that question. You can know for sure. And the peace of God be with us all.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Father in heaven, so very grateful for your work in your word, by your spirit.

[33 : 27] Pray for anyone here today that is not connected to you. We can fake it for a time, but we can't fake it forever. And I pray that you will call us home, bring us home, graft us into Jesus Christ, our life.

For those who are struggling because life is difficult and overwhelming, it causes us to doubt, it causes us to wonder. For those, would you assure them again by your word and through your spirit how we need to hear from you, Lord, that this is your work that you need to do in us and we need to rest.

And Lord, help us also to passionately want to spread the seed wherever we go. So the joy that we have in our life, may we also experience that in our testimony as we tell others about you and how to be connected to you.

In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.