

Remain

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- [0 : 0 0] All right, well this morning we're continuing on with Jesus and his teaching on the night of his betrayal. We're in John chapter 15. If you have a Bible with you, you can open it up to that passage.
- Or there's the black Bibles in front of you there under the seats, or it'll be on screen this morning. We've been exploring some of the different elements of Jesus' analogy here with vine and branches and fruit.
- We've talked about how God is the gardener, how he's at work like a gardener to bring about a fruitful vineyard, a people full of good fruit.
- We've talked about how Jesus is the true vine, how he is the source of life and of all that is good. We've talked about how we are the branches, those of us who believe in him.
- And we talked at length two weeks ago about pruning and how God does that pruning work in our lives so that we will be even more fruitful. Well, this morning we're going to come back to this passage, but we're going to come at it from yet another angle.
- [1 : 0 9] Our focus this morning is going to be on this word that we see in verse four, remain, or as some translations that you may be more familiar with, abide.
- In verse four, Jesus says, 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. What does it mean to remain or abide in Jesus?
- How do we do that? What is Jesus wanting these men to do? This will be our focus for this morning.
- And then we'll end by reflecting on this sweet reality that Jesus remains in us. I suspect that many of us wrestle with this simple command that Jesus gives.
- [2 : 1 6] Remain in me. It's so easy to say it. But what does it mean? How do we do it? We're looking for clues to this right here in this passage in what Jesus said.
- And the first one comes to us here in verse four. Jesus says, 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. So Jesus uses this analogy from the vineyard to explain a little of what it means to remain in him.
- He says, it's like with the branch of a plant. Of course, Jesus is referring to grapevines. But most of us are not too familiar with grapevines.
- So let's imagine something similar grown in our climate. Tomato plants. Picture in your mind a tomato plant. Imagine that main shoot. The vine.
- [3 : 2 4] And then the branches coming off of that main shoot. Jesus says, no branch can bear fruit by itself.
- So just picture one of those branches of your tomato plant by itself just lying there on the ground. Broken off. Separated from the vine.

Will it produce fruit like that? No, says Jesus. In order for the fruit to grow, it must remain in the vine.

It must stay connected. It must continue to be attached. Now let's translate the metaphor of vines and branches to people.

That's what Jesus does here. He says, just as it is with the branch and the vine, so it is with you. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

[4 : 23] So God, the gardener, wants to see good fruit come from our lives. Things like I mentioned a couple weeks back. Love.

Honesty. Faithfulness. Self-control. Gentleness. Compassion. Forgiveness.

Holiness. But just like the branch of a plant, you cannot bring forth these good things by yourself.

On your own. I was thinking about this this week. You know, if all this stuff I just mentioned is the stuff that God wants to see in our lives, if that's what pleases Him, can we please God on our own without Jesus?

Can we live that loving life with God's kind of love that He wants us to live towards others without Jesus?

[5 : 31] Your pride may tell you, yes, but Jesus says, no. No branch can bear fruit by itself on its own.

We need Christ to live a life that pleases God. We need Jesus and what He gives and what He does in us to bring forth that good fruit that God is looking for in our lives.

And so Jesus says, you must remain in me like a branch. You must remain in the vine to bear fruit. Now this word remain in the original language that John wrote in, it simply means to stay or to continue.

There's nothing out of the ordinary about the word. Its meaning comes from the analogy here as Jesus uses it. To remain in Jesus is like a branch of a plant staying connected to that plant, continuing to be enjoined to the main shoot.

In other words, Jesus is saying, don't leave off from me. Don't walk away from me. Stay fastened to me. Stay joined to me.

[6 : 49] What is this command in this analogy really about? It's about relationship.

Stay in relationship with me, says Jesus. This is what it's all about. And in case there's any doubt, we need only look a couple verses down to verse 9 and Jesus will say it loud and clear.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If that's not an invitation or call to relationship, I don't know what is.

This whole analogy of vine and branches, it tells us something of the kind of relationship that God desires with his people. It's meant to be a permanent and ongoing relationship.

Think about the connection between a plant and its branches. How are the branches connected to the plant? Well, it's not like this.

[8 : 16] There's some kind of an interlocking mechanism here that allows him to stay connected for a time. But the way this is designed, it can connect and disconnect and connect and disconnect as much as you want, as much as you need.

These things, though, are only meant to be together when this thing runs out of battery. Is that how our relationship with Jesus should be?

We come to him, we relate to him, just when we're really in need of something from him. The rest of the time, though, we're kind of off on our own, living as independent agents, not too worried about him.

No. The branch of a plant is meant to be connected all the time. Ongoing. Permanent. It's a part of the plant.

And it has to stay there. In the same way, we're meant to be in a continual, ongoing, permanent relationship with Jesus, our Savior.

[9 : 27] We also see here in this analogy that this is meant to be a very deep and intimate relationship between Jesus and us. Think again about how the branch is attached to the tree.

It's not plug and play like your iPhone. There's a real sense in which that branch is a part of the tree. It's one with the plant.

In fact, sometimes we don't even bother to distinguish between the branch and the tree. We just say that whole thing, the tomato plant, the whole thing, it's all a plant or that tree. It's all the tree.

And this is a picture of the kind of relationship that Jesus desires with these men and with you and with me where we are one with him.

We are so deeply joined with him that we are a part of him and he of us. We're not just, you know, loosely affiliated with him.

[10 : 34] We're not just in today's vernacular subscribe to his channel. It's not as though we've just clicked the like and the follow button on Jesus' profile and we just take our regular updates and that's about it.

No, this kind of relationship that Jesus has for us, it's a deep, it's an intimate relationship where we become one with him, united with him.

Paul, in his letters, didn't even hesitate to refer to all who belong to Jesus as members of his body, that is the body of Christ.

Just like your hand or your foot is a member of your body. And so, remain in me like a branch remains in the vine.

It speaks of this deep and intimate relationship that we have with Jesus. Again, verse 9 leads us in this direction.

[11 : 34] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. As Jesus calls these men to a certain kind of love relationship with him, he thinks about the love relationship that he has with his Father.

And it is a rich, deep, and intimate relationship. That's the kind of relationship that he is pulling and calling his followers to. And so, when Jesus says, remain in me like a branch remains in the vine, he's calling us to continually give ourselves to him, to this kind of relationship with him, this ongoing, intimate, love relationship.

relationship. Now we might wonder, why does Jesus seem to emphasize this so much? If you have kind of skimmed through the whole passage, you'll notice that he talks about this quite a bit.

Remain in me. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. Verse 5, remain in me. Verse 6, if you do not remain in me.

Verse 7, if you remain in me. And verse 9, how many times he says it, it's amazing. Why is this such a big deal? What's the temptation or the danger?

[13 : 11] Well, according to Jesus, there is a real danger if you do not remain in him. Verse 6, if you do not remain in me, you're like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. That's stated pretty strongly, isn't it? But if we're following this analogy, it makes perfect sense.

It's not just that we can't bear fruit without Jesus, it's that without Jesus, we will wither, we will die spiritually. That's how it goes with the branch of a plant or the branch of a tree.

When it gets separated from the tree, what happens to it is it just sits there on the ground. Eventually, the life that was in it disappears. Its flexibility and greenness just fades away.

The leaves turn brown and crunchy. The branch itself becomes gray and dry and brittle. And it's now good for almost nothing except for getting a fire going.

[14 : 29] It kind of amazes me just how relevant Jesus is 2,000 years later. I think about this all the time when I go out into my backyard. We have a huge poplar tree in our backyard and it seems like every time I go out there there's at least one or more branches that have broken off, that have fallen down on the ground.

And guess what we do with them. We pick them up, we put them in a trash bin, designated sticks, and I drive them out to the dump and dump them in the burn pit.

there's a very real danger to leaving off from Jesus, to walking away from him. You will wither.

You will die, says Jesus. If you choose to walk away from Jesus and go and live for yourself, do things your own way, rejecting him, you won't be connected to Jesus, the vine.

And if you aren't connected to him, then you won't have what he gives, what the vine gives to the branch, which is life. We need a continuing relationship with Jesus, an abiding relationship, and without that, we're in real danger.

[15 : 55] Now, I know there's some debate about how we should take these words of Jesus, and the question rolling around in some of your minds is, well, can we lose our salvation? Are you saying that? Is Jesus saying that?

Jesus says a similar sort of thing at the beginning of this section in verse two. He says, the Father cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. This is a really important discussion, and so we're actually going to save that question for next Sunday.

I don't want to rush it. I don't want anybody to get any funny ideas. we'll talk about it next week, but for now, I hope you don't just dismiss this warning of Jesus here in verse six.

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Jesus said this to Peter, to James, and to John that night, and so we ought to take it to heart as well.

[17 : 01] The relationship that we have with Jesus is everything. It is our life. Not just our earthly life, not just abundant life, but it is our life, eternal life.

It comes in and through our continuing relationship with Jesus. Listen again to how John said it back in chapter three, verse thirty-six.

He said, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Listen again to how John will say it many years later in his first letter to the churches. First John, chapter five, verse eleven. He writes, God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. life. Why is Jesus so concerned that we stay in this kind of a close, intimate, connected relationship with him?

[18 : 22] Because just like the branch of a tree, our life depends on it. If we remain in him, we will have life. We will have all the good things that come through Christ.

Christ. But if we do not, we will perish. So remaining in Jesus, this is of the utmost importance for every follower of Jesus.

And this relationship, it's not just a one-way street. Jesus doesn't say, no matter what you do, I will remain in you, and you will bear much fruit.

No, it's a real relationship that Jesus is after. It's a two-way street. He urges and commands us, remain in me.

There's something we must do for our part in this relationship. And it's not a big list of good works. And it's not that we must bear our own fruit. It's a relational thing.

[19 : 28] We must give ourselves to him continually for the rest of our lives. Remain in me.

Stay in me. And this is not just something that we do automatically. I mean, think about that. If every single follower of Jesus just does this automatically, Jesus wouldn't need to say this.

He certainly wouldn't emphasize it so much. He wouldn't warn us about what would happen if we don't do it. It's not automatic. It's not something that we do without even intending to or thinking about.

We do need to make some sort of effort. Jesus tells them to remain in him because it's something they must intentionally decide to do day after day, year after year.

And so we come now to this final question. How do we do relationship with Jesus? We might be tempted to think that the disciples had it easy.

[20 : 39] After all, they were with Jesus. They could see him face to face. They could just talk to him and ask him questions and they could listen to his responses. They could walk with him on the road.

But it's here I think we must realize Jesus doesn't say remain with me, but remain in me.

He doesn't say remain with me. We've been hearing Jesus talk this very night about how he's about to leave his disciples and they will not be able to follow him. Jesus is about to be taken from them.

crucified. And yes, he will have several visits with them after he rises from the dead, but not long after that he will be taken up to heaven and the disciples will no longer be with Jesus, at least not like they used to.

And I think it's here that we realize what these words in John 15 are all about. Jesus is preparing them for a different way of relating to him. than they have right now.

[21 : 55] Even though they cannot remain with him, they can remain in him. This relationship he has with them is going to continue even while he's away.

But it's going to look different. And here's the wonderful truth about how it will be different. Jesus will not be with them. He'll be even closer.

He'll be in them. Remain in me as I also remain in you.

Do you hear that? if you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Do you hear this? Yes, Jesus is calling them to remain in him. But Jesus is also assuring them, I will remain in you.

[23 : 05] Do you hear this? Jesus will be doing his part of the relationship with us.

He'll be like a vine does to the branch, giving us all that we need for life. He'll be giving us everything that we need to bear much good fruit.

He'll be continuing to love us just as the father has loved him. And the truth is the part that he plays on his side of this relationship is far greater because he is the vine.

Yes, we need to remain in him, but no, we're not left completely to ourselves to do it. He remains in us.

at times we do drift away, give into temptation, blow it, sin, but Jesus remains in us.

[24 : 15] He draws us back. He disciplines us lovingly. He forgives. there's a sense in which we could go back to the beginning of the message and look at this whole thing now through Jesus side of this relationship.

I will remain in you, says Jesus. Like a tree holds and nourishes and gives life to its branches.

I will stay connected to you, says Jesus. In relationship with you, I will not let you go. I will not abandon you.

I will not leave you. I will not just let you fall to the ground. He's the one that desires this permanent, ongoing, intimate, and deep relationship with us.

And so as long as you remain in me, I will remain in you, says Jesus. I will see to it that you bear much fruit. And all of this Jesus will do in them and he does in us through his spirit, the Holy Spirit who he gives to us.

[25 : 36] So yes, the relationship between Jesus and his disciples will change from here on out, but not for the worse. It will change for the better.

So how do we do relationship with Jesus? How do we remain in him? I want to get down to the practical, but I want to connect it to the story that we're reading here.

We do it the same way these eleven men learned to do it after Jesus left. No longer could they see his human face right there in front of them, but they learned to trust in his unseen presence within them by his spirit.

No longer could they see him walking down the road right there in front of them. So they learned to walk by faith, obeying the commands and the instructions that he had given them about all kinds of things in life, wherever they were, with whomever they were with.

No longer did they see him right there in front of them, just open up his lips and start teaching, but they learned to listen to the Holy Spirit he gave later and his reminders of what Jesus said, even leading them to write down the very words that Jesus spoke to them.

[27 : 07] In one sense, doing relationship with Jesus is unlike any other relationship that we have. He lives in us by his spirit. He's unseeable with our eyes, he's untouchable with our hands, and yet we are commanded to believe in him, to trust him, to speak to him, to listen to him, to serve him, to obey him, this one living in us who we can't see.

But in another sense, doing relationship with Jesus is very much like other relationships that we have. We talk to him when we pray, we listen to him as we read and reflect on the words that he spoke.

Like the disciples, we learn from his example and his actions as we read and reflect on the things that he did and how he lived when he was here. We serve him and we do his work by obeying his commands wherever we are with whoever we're with in anticipation of the day when he returns and we will see him face to face.

This is how we do relationship with Jesus. This is how we remain in him. we could boil it down really simply to just a few words.

Words of some of those familiar songs. Trust and obey. Or the kids song read your Bible, pray every day.

[28 : 51] And it might irk you to hear that this is it. That this is how we do it. Like that's it. Trust and obey. Read your Bible, pray every day. That's how we do relationship with Jesus.

I mean, come on. Reading a book, talking to the air. But that's the secret. It all comes down to what's in your heart as you approach this book.

As you get down on your knees to pray. What's in your heart as you sit down and read your Bible? Are you there just to check off another box?

And be a good Christian? Or do you sit down to read this book with a hard attitude of Lord, I am here to listen to you speak for your servant is listening.

That's the hard attitude of relationship. What's in your heart as you get down on your knees to pray? I guess I'll have to pray again here.

[30 : 01] I'm supposed to do that to be a good Christian even though I don't really feel like it. It kind of feels like I'm just talking to the air. Or do you come with this heart attitude?

Lord Jesus, I'm tired. I'm worn out today. I don't even feel like praying but I know that you are the one that I need to talk to now.

And you pray. That's the heart attitude of relationship. And it makes all the difference. If you're wondering why this doesn't feel like relationship, could it be that you haven't been treating these things like relationship?

Reading your Bible. Prayer. prayer. That's how we talk to and listen to Christ today. He speaks today through his words.

The same words he spoke long ago. This is how we remain in Jesus. Doing the things he has commanded us to do day after day.

[31 : 12] Serving our king even while he's away. This is how we remain in Jesus. And so I want to encourage you today simply in this way.

Give yourself wholly, completely to him. To that relationship with him through his word, through prayer, through obedience, through worship, through complete surrender.

He is the vine. And we are the branches. God let's pray. Father in heaven, it's a wonderful relationship you have made for us with our Savior Jesus.

And there are depths to it that we long to grow in and understand. And I pray that that would be what happens for each one of us here. Whether young or old, that we would never grow tired or disinterested, but that we would continue to know the depths of your love for us.

That we would continue to find sweet joy in walking with you day by day. Help us to remain in you.

[32 : 37] Protect us from anything in our world, in our own hearts, that we try to separate us from you. Thank you for the assurance that you remain in us.

In Jesus' name, amen.