

Remain in Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2020

Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Many of the Christian friends that you had when you were young still loving the Lord today.

Many of the Christian friends you had when you were young still loving the Lord today. Someone in my Bible group, he said to me, you know, growing old, it isn't for sissies.

Well, neither is being a Christian either. It takes an enormous amount of stamina to still love the Lord year after year after year. Are many Christians you once knew still loving the Lord today?

I asked around the church and people said that lots of their Christian friends aren't so anymore. Some of them still are, which is good, but then their children have given up their faith.

I'm thinking back to my own journey. I've seen lots of Christians fall away for one reason or another. Maybe you can remember a time in your life when you would admit that you lost your faith for a moment.

[1 : 0 1] We record our weekly attendance here just for the Anglican Diocese statistics. And it's easy for pastors to sort of live and die based off their popularity. But I do think weekly attendance gives some clue as to how zealous people are.

And then there's us who are physically here in the room. Are our Christian lives still full of zeal? Are we fired up for Jesus, keen to pray, committed to serve?

Maybe over the years we've run out of steam. While we're physically here, maybe we're not as fruitful as we once were. It takes an enormous amount of stamina to live the Christian life.

On this slide, please, Gwyneth. This is Staminade. It's a sports drink powder. It doesn't look like much, but in 1980s Australia, this thing was all the rage.

I remember my dad used to take it before he went jogging. It's full of electrolytes and magnesium. All good stuff to help you go the extra mile. I wonder if you took it in your time.

[2 : 1 0] Thanks, Gwyneth. Well, John chapter 15 is full of electrolytes and magnesium. It's Staminade for the Christian life. It's Jesus' jar of good stuff to help us keep going year after year after year.

You can tell that it's Christian Staminade because the repeated idea is to remain or abide in Jesus, to stay connected to him.

It's there in verse 4. It says, remain in me as I also remain in you. It's there in verse 9. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain. Verse 10. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love. It's there in a few other places, but the dominant theme throughout our passage, remain.

This is Christian Staminade. It's the eve of Jesus' death. His apostles must remain long after he goes away. If we are his disciples, we too must remain as long as we live.

[3 : 1 5] This passage is the Staminade that we need. And so there's a handout there. And please keep your Bibles open to John chapter 15. We're at point 1.

Remaining in Jesus is not about filling up his churches. That is not an end in itself. He wants us to bear fruit, actually. Verse 5.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Verse 8. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit. Verse 16.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you. Why? So that you might go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last. That is a fruit that will remain.

In fact, you might say the purpose of being a Christian, in fact, the meaning of our whole lives is that we bear fruit for God. Verse 8 says, This is to his glory.

[4 : 1 5] My old flatmate Richard, he is a fruit farmer. And any chance I got, I'd go and visit him on the farm when we go away for weekends. And as for me, I loved escaping the city, breathing the

country air, walking through the orchards.

I was really picturesque and relaxing. But Richard was more concerned about the fruit. You see, that's why he planted the trees, so that the fruit would be to his credit.

In the same way, bearing fruit in the Christian life is to God's credit. It brings him glory. Our Old Testament passage, so in the Old Testament passage, God's purpose for Israel was that they would bear fruit.

Isaiah described them as a vineyard. God says he gave them everything they needed to be fruitful. We heard how he dug up the land and cleared it of stones.

He built a watchtower and installed a winepress. He planted only the choicest of vines. But when he looked for good fruit, that is justice, it yielded only bloodshed.

[5 : 24] When he looked for righteousness in Israel, all he found was bad fruit, that is distress. In verse 4 of that Isaiah passage, he says, what more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done?

See, rather than bringing God glory, Israel had fallen into disrepute. And so he sends them into exile. And while that was the Old Testament, bearing fruit is still God's purpose for us today. So verse 1 of our John passage, Jesus says, my father is a gardener. He's still got the same job. Jesus calls himself the true vine.

You see, if bearing fruit is God's purpose, then Jesus is the vine through which it all happens. In fact, he's the true vine. He's the better Israel.

And like Israel, God gives us everything we need to be fruitful. Look at verse 2. 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.

[6 : 31] When it comes to gardening, God knows what he's doing. But we don't want to misunderstand this. This is not saying that we have to be the Grange Hermitage of Christians.

That is, the top shelf wine of Christians who converts everyone they meet, never misses a church service, never misses a daily devotion. But if you're the \$6 Aldi wine who hasn't converted anyone, then like some snooty wine critic, God will sniff you and swirl you and whatever they do and spit you out.

No, we don't earn our salvation by our fruit. Verse 3, Clean here is the same word for pruned. We have been pruned already by Jesus' word. As we trust in it, as we allow it to nip and tuck and prune our lives, it connects us to him.

You see, we don't have to worry about the fruit. Verse 7, verse 16, it says, ask the Father for anything. That is, ask him for fruit. It's his responsibility.

[7 : 43] God is the gardener. All we have to do is remain in the vine. Verse 4, Remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. So what I've brought today is a vine, a grapevine. Now, I got this during the week and it looks pretty good, doesn't it?

Here are the actual grapes that fell off halfway through the sermon this morning, which was, that was no good. But, what if I told you that this branch was as fruitful as ever?

Look, there are the grapes. And, next year, you should expect an even bigger harvest than this year and the year after an even bigger harvest. What if I told you that? You would tell me I'm crazy and you would be correct.

because, on Thursday, when I clipped this vine, that was the very minute it started to wither. You can see that, actually, it's completely hopeless at the moment.

[8 : 44] It might still have leaves, it might have a grape or two, but as far as bearing fruit in the future, this branch just doesn't have the stamina. It is withered because it's been cut from the vine.

That is all pretty common sense. And, I love how, look at how these verses are structured. Please, Gwyneth, the next slide. See, verse 4 and verse 6 are the yellow ones and they are instructions about growing grapes.

So, verse 4, no branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. And, verse 6, branches that wither are picked up, thrown into the fire.

That's how you grow grapes. Any good gardener will tell you that. But, the next level in the orange level, verse 4 and 5, Jesus says, Christianity is like growing grapes.

Verse 4, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. And, the other orange one underneath, the same idea, apart from me, you can do nothing.

[9 : 49] And, the reason why all of it, in the middle, in the green, I am the vine. You are the branches. Don't forget our place. in the universe. He says, if you remain in me and I in you, then you will bear much fruit.

If you want to guarantee no fruit, cut yourself off from the vine. But, remember, cut off vines like this thing, they're only good for one thing.

Verse 6, such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. The choice is this, we can be fruitful or firewood.

It's a very serious warning from Jesus. No good to start our Christian lives fired up and full of zeal, but then year after year to get a little cold for one reason or another.

Maybe we don't like what Jesus says anymore. Maybe we're sick of other Christians. Maybe we're just not feeling it. And, for whatever reason, we are less fruitful because we didn't remain in Jesus.

[10 : 52] This is how we wither. See, Christianity isn't for sissies, is it? It takes an enormous amount of stamina year after year after year.

Jesus knows something about this. Remember, there were 12 apostles until just recently when Judas disconnected himself from the vine.

He betrayed Jesus and now there are only 11. And while all of that is very negative and frightening, it's also very positive. Remember, we don't earn our place by our fruit or producing the best of wines.

God is the gardener. We're plugged into the best of vines. The fruit will come. Actually, verse 5 is a promise. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

We just need to remain. And of course, that begs the question, how? And the rest of the passage answers that. This is point two. How to remain.

[11 : 58] Remaining in Jesus is about three things. Obeying Jesus' words, staying close to his death and loving each other. They are interwoven together. And when you look at those, the A, B and the C, you might be tempted to pick and choose which one you like and which one you really don't like.

The trouble is they're all interwoven tightly together. We can't have one without the others. So, let's look at the first one. Obey Jesus' words.

Verse 9, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. Okay, how do we do that? Verse 10, If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.

That, I think that's fairly common sense. The way we show our love for Jesus is to obey what he tells us, to let his word live in us, to allow it to prune and shape our lives.

It doesn't make sense to say, I love Jesus, but I won't do what he says. Or, I'm a Christian, but I just live my own way. Thanks very much. Verse 10, If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.

[13 : 08] A way to check whether we're still remaining, do we still pay attention to what Jesus says? So, here's a few examples. Do we remain when Jesus says that we're all sinners in need of repentance?

Or, are we like the guilt-free world out there? Jesus says we can't serve God and money, but do we nurture our money or our stuff more than our relationship with him?

Do we remain on Jesus' side when he talks about controversial things? Or, do we side with the world's way? Read any of his commands in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, it's very important for Christians, full of Jesus' commands. As you read it, ask yourself if you're still as radical about anger or purity or prayer.

Are we still salt and light in the world? Or, do we look just like everyone else now? Actually, even Jesus himself obeys. Verse 10, if you keep my commands, you'll remain in my love just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

[14 : 21] See, if we're better than Jesus, then we don't have to obey. But because we're obviously not, obedience is the way. People might come back with that old phrase, you know, Christianity's not about rules, it's about relationships.

And I'm not sure that I agree with that. Verse 10, if you keep my commands, you'll remain in my love. Obedience is tied to love.

Verse 14 says, you are my friends if you do what I command. The only way a holy God and sinful people can have a relationship is through obedience.

He says we do. That's how the relationship is maintained. Obedience is a tricky thing in this day and age. But part A, it's how to remain in Jesus.

Part B, another way is to stay close to his death. Verse 13, greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friend.

[15:23] Jesus, the night before he dies, he's about to lay his life down for his friends. His death will save them. And so for us, if we haven't been very good at part A, maybe you might admit that there was a time in your life where you have drifted away, maybe you're cold as you sit here today, come back to Jesus' death.

However much we've drifted, we can confess and be grafted in as if we never left because of his death for us. If you're not a Christian here today, this is how you begin the Christian life, this is how you become part or a branch in God's vineyard, as you trust in the death of the Lord Jesus to clean you.

It's why we do the Lord's Supper all the time. We want to stay close to Jesus' body and blood. That saves us. To bear fruit, we have to remain in his love, verse 9.

How are we to do that? Verse 10, keeping Jesus' commands. What is your command? Part C, verse 12. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

Perhaps the trickiest one of the three, love others. Because he's speaking to his apostles, it means love other Christians even harder, I might say.

[16:46] Are we less fruitful? The question will be, how are you going at loving other Christians? Do we look forward to our Sunday gatherings and our Bible groups?

How are we going at serving and praying for one another? Just last week was our Kingdom Growth Prayer Night and in my time here I've never seen the room as full as it was.

It was a real encouragement. Lots of brothers and sisters wrestling in prayer for one another. Our rosters, they're full of servants, just come in the week at any point, come in on a Saturday.

Lots of people busy serving one another. Lots of demonstrations of love here at this church. People are away because of the coronavirus, but in a positive way, that is them loving us, not wanting to infect anyone else or endanger anyone else.

It's an act of love for them to give up their Sunday church for the sake of us. The rest of us braving the panic, showing our love. Either way, our church is full of people remaining in the vine.

[17:59] It's really encouraging, but we don't want to take our foot off the gas. It takes stamina, remember? And we are realists, because it is hard to love other Christians.

Sometimes we hurt one another. We're not always good at part A, obeying the commands. Verse 13 is the stamina. greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

See, if Jesus loved me so much that he laid his life down for me, perhaps I can love another Christian who isn't so lovely.

Loving others is a reflection of how much we understand Jesus' death for us. B and C, you can see they're interwoven together. It's hard to practice love if you don't realize how much you have been loved.

It's hard to pick and choose A, B and C. They're all tightly connected. These three dynamics of the Christian life, A, B and C, they will keep us remaining in Jesus.

[19:06] They are the stamina that will ensure we make it to the ends. We spoke about church attendance. I think this passage gives us a really positive view about turning up each week.

In our regular meetings, we do all three of these things. We obey or take Jesus' words seriously. We always come back to his death, the Lord's Supper, and confession.

And we do that in a community of other brothers and sisters. Practicing these three dynamics will show ourselves to be good branches, ones that are tightly connected to the vine, bearing fruit for God.

God. That is what God's people are for. This is how we glorify him. This is why Jesus chooses people, that they would bear fruit. A fruit for life, it will attract other people to.

Verse 8, bearing fruit shows ourselves to be Jesus' disciples. If we are the people God wants us to be, other people will ask you, why are your lives so distinct from everyone else?

[20:15] Why aren't you weighed down by guilt? Why are you so kind and generous even when you were wronged? And the answer is we are fruitful because we're connected to Jesus, whose love we practice, whose death has cleansed us, and whose words we obey.

So let me pray. Father God, please help us to remain in Jesus. so that we will bear fruit for you. Father, please help us with these three tough things of obeying your word and loving other Christians and staying close to Jesus' death.

We need your help to do them. Please, would you help us realize how much we have been loved so we can practice love? We need your help to be fruitful.

We can't do it on our own. Father, we ask in your name. Amen.