

Remaining in The Vine

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[0 : 0 0] let's pray dear lord please give us humble hearts as we look at your word this evening father please may we be encouraged challenged and also built up in it in jesus name we pray amen there seems to be a fascination that all humans seem to have with wanting to know the final events of people's lives when a famous person dies for instance we want to know what they did in their last week in the days leading up to their death we're interested in their last words i saw this a couple of weeks ago as a well-known tv personality died very suddenly and in the days that followed there was lots of articles in the paper and online about this person's final days their final appearances and their final facebook posts and words and often if you've ever read a biography you'll you'll know that the pace seems to slow down in the days that are leading up to the person's death as those events are teased out and we're given more details well it's been a few weeks now since we're in john's gospel but that's exactly what we've been seeing uh in john's gospel from chapter 13 onwards the pace has slowed down as we enter the last day of jesus's life before he would be betrayed and crucified we're told in 13 verse 1 that jesus knew that the time had come for him to return to the father and so what follows is jesus's final instructions to his disciples as they share a meal together and so far in our series and john we've been examining those instructions our last time we ended in chapter 14 and we saw that jesus and his disciples had left the upper room and now they're on the move and in chapter 15 we see that the conversation continues as jesus and his disciples go through the moonlit streets of jerusalem jesus's words in the upper room was filled with comfort but now jesus's words in john chapter 15 turn into an unexpected challenge and warning the lives of the disciples must match his and be fruitful for god's glory and jesus teaches this to his disciples in the analogy of the vine and the branches so tonight we're going to be looking at that analogy and as we begin we want to look at the characters in this analogy and see who they are firstly we have the vine look with me at verse 1 jesus says i am the true vine what is jesus getting at here what does he mean by this well the picture of the vine would have been familiar to the jews in jesus's time particularly as israel in the old testament is likened to a vine or a vineyard we've seen this in the passage that brendan just read out for us as israel is likened to a privileged a vineyard that had been given everything in order to be fruitful but it only produced bad fruit in ezekeil chapter 15 israel is again likened to a useless vine that will be destroyed by fire for its lack of fruitfulness in fact most of the times in the old testament that israel is likened to a vineyard it's depicted as a degenerate type vine which fails to bring forth the fruit that god expected of them so when jesus announces here in john 15 1 that he is the true vine he's in effect saying that he is the true israel which brings forth the fruit that god expected as the true vine he produced what the israel of old failed to produce fruit for which the gardener was looking for our next we have the gardener whom we're told in verse 1 is jesus's father

i now used to live next door to this elderly couple they were in their 80s then they're probably in their 90s now and uh they're still gardening from what i hear they're in the garden 24 7 basically the garden looked spectacular they really cared for that garden perhaps you uh have an auntie or an uncle or perhaps you're like that yourself but you know i've got nothing on the picture of the gardener that we have here is as the picture we have of the father is one of care for the vine he cares for the vine and tends to it in order to make the vine even more fruitful until it eventually bears as we see in verse 8 much fruit and in caring for the vine the father has two major duties firstly we're told in verse 2 he cuts off every branch that bears no fruit you see if a branch is not fruitful it's better to chop off that branch so that it doesn't sap the vine of valuable nutrients and energy so that the fruitful branches get that energy and nutrients that it needs to be even more fruitful and the thing about vine branches is that if they're not bearing fruit like they're supposed to then they're not actually good for anything the wood i'm told is useless for making anything out of and it's not even good firewood as it smolders away emitting little to no heat so basically an unfruitful branch is only fit for the dump where it's gathered up and burned the second duty of the gardener is that he prunes the vine look with me at the second half of verse 2 jesus says well every branch that does not bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful see once those old dead branches are out the way the gardener still has work to do in his care for the vine he also cleans or prunes the vine by picking off the little shoots that spring up on the fruitful branches this too is designed to streamline those nutrients to the fruitful branches so that they become even more fruitful now vine often grows fast and luxurious so the careful gardener makes sure that it doesn't grow too fast too soon and so become unfruitful so the gardener carefully prunes and cuts it back and this is the picture that we have of the father again loving and caring for the vine are doing all he can in order for the branches to be fruitful and now we come to the branches themselves look with me at verse 5 jesus says i am the vine you are the branches now here jesus identifies the 11 disciples as being branches in the vine and what an intimate picture that we're given here is jesus shows us the relationship that he has with his disciples as there's nothing more unified than the vine and its branches they're one and this unity would be one of the foremost things on jesus's mind as he prayed for his disciples in john 17 his desire was that his disciples would experience that same oneness that he and the father experience and so what we begin to see in this picture of the vine and the branches is actually the basis of christian living which consists of remaining united with jesus and bearing fruit and right from the start of this picture it becomes apparent that there are two types of branches branches there are branches that bear fruit and there are branches that don't bear fruit so let's examine this picture a little bit more deeply and as we do i will see that there's both an encouragement and a warning well first let's look at the encouragement to remain in the vine and the consequences of doing so see the major force of the encouragement here that jesus is giving the disciples is his command to them to remain in him look with me at verses four and five jesus says remain in me as i also remain in you no branch can be a fruit by itself it must remain in the vine neither can you be a fruit unless you

remain in me 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 here jesus is teaching just as the branch can't be a fruit unless it remains in the vine so disciples if they don't remain in jesus can't be a fruit and if you only hear one thing in this whole sermon this evening and make sure you get this if you're a disciple of jesus here this evening then you need to remain in him without remaining in him you won't be a fruit it's impossible and when was the last time you saw a fruitful branch running down the road unattached to the vine if you've seen one just let me know afterwards but i haven't seen one now we must remain in jesus he is our lifeline by which we receive the life-giving nutrients that we need to be fruitful and without him there is no fruit and eventually we'll wither and die now i think that remaining in jesus has two major implications firstly as i've just been saying i think it means to remain united to the vine and reliant on the vine for sustenance and not only will a branch unattached to the vine not be a fruit it will wither and die i wonder if you feel the tension that exists between remaining in jesus and finding your life in him and the temptation to try and find your life elsewhere than other so-called vines i'm not wanting to take the picture too far or get any get crazy on you or anything like that but this passage did challenge me and made me ask the question am i seeking my life in other vines is my vine something other than the true vine of jesus christ christ where am i attaching myself to other vines that promise fruitfulness like the vine of money education popularity or success a career a selfishness and the thought that i don't need to rely on the true vine as i've got my life pretty well sorted thank you very much lord or is there something in your life that's hindering your reliance on the true vine secondly remaining in jesus means that we are one with him and therefore we live like him look with me at verses 9 and 10 jesus says as the father has loved me so i have loved you now remain in my love 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 so here jesus moves away from speaking in an analogy to speaking plainly about what it means to remain and what that fruit will look like see to remain in the vine means to remain in jesus's love and we do this by obeying his commands whoa whoa hold up hold up i can hear people thinking that right now i was thinking that when i first read this you mean to tell me that remaining in jesus's love is conditioned on my obedience and we don't like that talk too much in our evangelical churches do we i was so committed and rightly so to declaring the gospel as being saved by grace through faith and not by works that these verses seem to throw us a little you know they didn't they needn't throw us as they're a natural connection and consequence of our unity with jesus you see as followers of christ who have been saved by grace we're united with him and we're being called to be like him and this will mean that we bear fruit like jesus now in the new testament uh fruit is described in many ways

um making disciples uh living out our spiritual gifts but here in john 15 i think this fruit comes in the form of loving one another and that's so big for john even if you read his letters uh we can tell if we're christians by how we love one another he says look with me at chapter 15 verses 12 to 13 jesus says my command is this love each other as i have loved you greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends that jesus laid down his life for his friends his disciples and all who would follow him and now jesus is calling us his disciples and his disciples then to remain in his love by commanding them to love one another and this is the fruit that's expected if we're true branches that are remaining in the vine if we're united with christ then we must reflect that by loving as jesus loved like jesus we're to love one another to the point of laying down our lives for one another does that mean i have to take a bullet for you or you have to take a bullet for me i don't i don't know if that's necessarily what it's saying here but this is a challenge to me you see it's easy for me to think of myself as loving my brothers and sisters once a week on a sunday but am i really willing to lay down my life for them now i've been thinking about what this would look like practically what does it mean to lay down our lives for one another you know i think that at the heart of it it means that we hold each other's life more precious than our own that we're willing to sacrifice our own time or money if need be to care for one another that we're willing to put our own plans on the back burner as it were for the sake of loving and serving others it's a big call but we're only being asked to do what our great savior did for us he gave up his own rights so that he could humble himself to save us you know i'm so encouraged by what i've seen here at the 6pm service this congregation most people here are serving in some way here on a sunday night going out of their way to serve i see people taking an interest in others and a willingness to love and serve one another that's awesome let's continue to grow in that more and more let's look for those opportunities not just on a sunday but also as we live life together outside of these walls well perhaps you've been a fruitful branch who's had a hard couple of years growth and this happens from time to time in the vineyard the good news is the gardener hasn't finished with you yet you see in his care for the vine and his desire to see you bear much fruit the father will prune you it's the process of removing everything that hinders your faithfulness in christ could be that there are lingering sinful habits that need pruning back well perhaps like a young luxurious vine you've grown so fast so fast so quickly that you need to be trimmed back so that you don't get ahead of yourself and realize that you still need to rely on the true vine the pruning knife comes in the form of god's word jesus says to his disciples in verse 3 you're already clean because of the word that i've spoken to you and that same word that's used for the word clean in verse 3 is the same greek word that's used in verse 2 for prune you see it's by god's word that the disciples are clean and it's by their continued exposure to his word that they continue to be cleaned and pruned and i think we know that by experience

don't we how often does a sharp end of the word prick our conscience and highlight our own sinfulness and it can be painful at times but it continues to cleanse us and change us well if the pruning knife comes in the form of god's word then quite possibly the handle of that knife may come in the form of trials and suffering and it can hurt but we need to take heart and be encouraged because as the writer of hebrews says i think it's up on the screen my son do not make light of the lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you because the lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts his sons endure hardship as discipline god is treating you as children for what children are not disciplined by their father see sometimes god's pruning comes in the form of hardship as god is treating us like his children and disciplines us out of love but you know isn't it awesome to know that through it all god is actually caring for you he cares about your fruitfulness and through this process he removes and all those things that are hindering your growth and fruitfulness and we actually grow through it don't we again this is an ongoing work and it can often be painful at times but it's always done out of care for the vine and for the fruitfulness of the branches and you know looking back in hindsight

[17 : 50] I can look at the times when god has disciplined me in the past through struggle or hardship or through his word and I can honestly say that through these struggles god has pruned me and I've grown in christ to be even more fruitful and looking back on it those times were painful you know even if i could go back and change my circumstances as i wouldn't because through these things god has shaped me and made me more fruitful for his glory and perhaps you too i can look back and see examples of that in your own life take encouragement by that god prunes the fruitful branches so that they can be even more fruitful well we've seen the encouragement to remain in jesus and the consequences of doing so and now we come to the warning and consequences of not remaining in jesus you see here we see the other kind of branch the unfruitful branch who fail to be a fruit and remain in the vine jesus says in verse 2 he that is the father cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit and in verse 6 he says 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 well this is a very sobering passage isn't it this passage raises many perplexing questions as many have wrestled with the fact that this seems to suggest that disciples can lose their salvation but is this the case who are these branches referring to well if we're to be good readers of the bible we must always endeavour to read any passage of scripture in context and if we do that we see that starting at chapter 13 of john there's been a lot on jesus' mind during that last evening with his disciples and one of the most pressing issues that evening was jesus' imminent betrayal by judas and this actually leads jesus to making a distinction between the disciples and judas now this distinction begins as jesus washes the disciples feet in chapter 13 jesus says and it's coming up on the screen in chapter 13 verse 10 those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet their whole body is clean and you are clean though not every one of you for he knew who was going to betray him and that is why he said not everyone was clean obviously jesus had in mind a contrast between his disciples and judas and i think this carries on into our passage in chapter 15 as jesus reminds the 11 again in verse 3 of chapter 15 that they are already clean and in light of that passage that we just read judas is obviously unclean so i believe in light of context that those dead branches in john 15 are judas type branches whose connection to jesus was superficial they were never real to begin with i read the gospel accounts and you'll see that there were many people following jesus and along the way we're told that a number deserted jesus as they're going got tough we see an example of this in john chapter 6 so i think in jesus's mind that night he's making a distinction between true disciples that bear fruit and remain and judas type branches whose attachment to jesus was a superficial one judas definitely looked the part though didn't he he followed jesus for the best part of three years and even had a level of responsibility among the disciples he was in charge of the money but as we see in the end

he was only a disciple by name outwardly his connection with jesus was superficial and he failed to remain now this has been the story throughout the history of the church is many have confessed the connection with christ many have looked the part for a time or even a long time but for many there's no true connection with jesus there's no fruit and they fail to remain and this is big for john again you read the the letters first john and second john and he's big on those who don't remain were never of us to begin with now recently i've had a number of sobering experiences as there's been a number of people close to me who have professed faith in christ but who have now given up the faith one of them was an elder in the church where i was converted this man was massive in my early walk as a christian the lord used this man massively to help me grow in my faith oh in the last six months this man has been completely deceived and walked away from christ and now he's actually openly attacking the core of our christian beliefs it doesn't end there because i can look back on my youth group days and say with an ache in my heart that over half of them are now not walking with christ and also say this with an ache in my heart but more than likely there's some here this evening who may not be walking with christ in ten years time again i'll say that soberly with a watchful eye on my own heart asking the lord to keep me close to his heart that i don't stray but that i remain now does this mean that there are some here who lose their salvation well i want to say no and that's an emphatic no you see john has taught a number of times throughout the gospel that a true believer cannot lose their salvation some of the most precious verses there are many passages that teach us in john but perhaps one of the clearest is john chapter 6 verse 39 to 40 jesus says this and this is the will of him who sent me that i shall lose none of all those he has given me but raise them up on the last day for my father's will is that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life and will raise them up at the last day no one who the father gives to jesus will be lost not one no those dead fruitless branches aren't christians that have lost their salvation they're so called disciples that were never real to begin with who have a superficial connection with jesus and the telltale sign that they were not true disciples is that they're no fruit and they fail to remain and yet again this is a great warning for us it reminds us of the importance of examining ourselves and making sure that we're truly united with christ that we're truly relying on the vine that we're united with him in loving his people because that's the telltale sign jesus obviously wanted his disciples to take this warning very seriously so will you heed that warning this evening while we're running out of time and there's so much in this passage before we close i do just want to make some quick observations about the consequences of us remaining in jesus and bearing fruit by loving one another in the sacrificial way and again these are because of our connection with him firstly if we're

loving in this way god is glorified look with me at verse 8 this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples again in the same way that jesus glorified the father we too will glorify him as we bear fruit by remaining in jesus and loving one another we bring glory to god secondly if we love in this way we'll show ourselves to be jesus's disciples we saw this at the end of verse 8 that we've just read but john also says in chapter 13 verse 34 and 35 he says this we've got that on the screen thanks guys a new command i give you love one another as i have loved you so you must love one another by this everyone will know that you're my disciples if you love one another this is what i feel like telling people on facebook who are always arguing over the minutest little theological detail you know that the way the world will know that we follow jesus and love him is if we love one another it's that simple because that's exactly what jesus did that's our greatest testimony thirdly our joy will be complete verse 11 it says i have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete see remaining in jesus and loving one another is the true way of contentment in the christian life again it's simple we think our contentment lies in so many other things fourthly we we're considered jesus's friends i love this verse 14 and 15 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've called you friends for everything that i learned from my father i have made known to you now isn't the thought of being called jesus's friend amazing the king of the universe calls us his friend like the disciples jesus has revealed his purposes to us in the gospel and by obeying him by loving one another he considers us as his friend and finally the consequences of loving like jesus is answered prayer jesus says in verse 16 you did not choose me but i chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit fruit that will last and so that whatever you ask in my name the father will give you see if we're bearing fruit by remaining in jesus and loving one another then our will actually conforms to god's will our prayers will conform to prayers about being bearing fruit for god's glory and god loves nothing more than to hear our prayers as we pray that we might continue to bear fruit for his glory and his honor and what an awesome privilege it is for us as christians that we are called jesus's friends that we can know that god hears our prayers through him god cares about you as a branch of the vine he wants you to remain in the vine to bear fruit for his glory will you remain in the vine will you love one another and show yourselves to be fruitful followers of christ well as always we need god's help in this so let's pray knowing that he hears us and will answer us as we pray that he'd help us to bear fruit to remain in christ for his glory let's pray dear lord we come to you helpless helpless like a branch that's reliant on the vine for its very life please help us to remain in christ help us to rely on him solely for our

life please may we bear fruit for your glory help us where we're lacking lord lord help us to love one another help us to do so for your glory and may this be a great witness to those who don't yet know you lord father keep our hearts close to you and don't let us stray we know our hearts are wicked but yet we know your spirit is more powerful than anything and your spirit lives in us so we ask that you would keep us reliant on jesus keep us in the vine help us to remain until that last day we will see your glory in jesus name we pray amen