

Committed to Christ

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[0 : 01] Please keep your Bibles open to that reading from John's Gospel, chapter 15, on page 104 of the New Testament sections of your Bibles. We're beginning a short series here in the morning service on John, chapter 15, on three marks which Jesus gives us of being a disciple.

Three distinctive marks, priorities of his people, what it means to be Christian. And the three marks we're going to be looking at will be devotion to Christ, devotion to Christ's people, and devotion to Christ's world.

And so we begin this morning with devotion to Christ. My son woke up this morning in a very good mood. We had a Kodak moment. Normally when he wakes up to go to school there can be a lot of moaning and dragging of people out of bed to get downstairs.

But this morning it was a Kodak moment. He woke up with a great stretch and he said, Oh, Daddy, do you know who the two people I love most in the world are? And I said, who? And he said, God and Jesus.

Isn't that good? So he goes to a great Sunday school. Aside from over-distinguishing God and Jesus and heading towards Arianism there, I thought that was a wonderful expression from the heart of a six-year-old.

[1 : 15] Of just simple devotion to Jesus. And he also said, you know, Daddy, I just love going to Sunday school because we do craft every week. But I think it's wonderful. He is in a wonderful Sunday school here.

And in that Sunday school, you know, our children are being taught, you know, to love Jesus. That being a Christian means loving Jesus. And I think that's wonderful.

I treasure that. And my prayer for him is that throughout the whole of his life, he's just going to rest in that love. And that through that relationship, God is going to bring forth wonderful fruit in his life. And that is a picture I want to put before you. That simple love for Jesus, really. Of what it means to be a Christian. What it means for us to be a disciple of Jesus.

Because in these verses from John's Gospel, Jesus is talking about what it means to be a disciple of his. Using this metaphor of the vine and the branches.

[2 : 19] And he says it's not something that you do. It's not something you achieve. It's not a duty. It's not a membership. It's a relationship. It's about him.

Refreshingly, wonderfully. Jesus puts himself at the center of it all. And says, Abide in me. And so as we look at these verses, I just have three points I want to make.

The first is the identity of Jesus and what that means for us in terms of being a Christian. And then the relationship he wants. And finally, as I close, the quality of life he offers.

First of all, the identity of Jesus. Because this is really important. It has a lot to do with what it means to be Christian. Let's look what he says. I am the true vine.

And my father is the vine dresser. Verse 1. Verse 5. I am the vine. You are the branches. Wonderful image. Jesus is speaking to his disciples here.

[3 : 21] And look what he says. I am the true vine. I am the source of life. You are the branches. He's not saying do anything. He's talking about a relationship.

He's talking about a state of being. And being a Christian means being attached to Jesus as a branch is to the vine. He defines himself as the true vine.

His disciples are those who are attached to him. A branch that is on its own is separated from its source of life and vitality. And that's what it means to be Christian.

Jesus is the source of our life. He is the source of abundant life. Of everlasting life. Of eternal life. Being a Christian means being united with Jesus in a living and organic way.

It's a relationship with him. It's about him. And he doesn't ask us to do anything or be anything. He invites us to join him.

[4 : 20] To be united to him. To have a relationship with him. I am the true vine. That's an Old Testament reference for Israel. God's chosen people. In the Old Testament, Israel is described as a vine.

But one that is fruitless and unfaithful. And the scriptures look forward to a day when the true vine will grow. And Jesus is saying, I am that true vine.

I am the source of blessing. I am the source of spiritual life. It's a slap in the face, of course, of the religious leaders of his time in Israel. The contrast between the stale, empty religion that they were peddling and the life that he offers.

He's saying, come to me for everlasting life. And that's just one of a series of these glorious magisterial statements Jesus makes in John's Gospel.

Which are really so clear about who he is. I am the bread of life. I am the living bread. I am the light of the world. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[5 : 26] I am from above. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the true vine. I mean, this is a staggering and awesome statement about the person that Jesus is.

He's saying, I am the source of life. I am eternity. I bring you life. And that cuts across any real question about who Jesus is.

You cannot read the Gospel of John, or the rest of the Bible for that matter, and come to any other conclusion than that this is who Jesus is. This is who Jesus claims to be.

Not just a moral teacher. Not simply pointing us to God. Not our way to God. He is God. He is God. Coming into human life. Coming into human existence.

He is the source of everlasting life. He comes from heaven and enters into our life that we might know abundant everlasting life. Every other spiritual option is false.

[6 : 30] Every other spiritual pathway is a dead end. And the glorious thing of it all is that being a Christian means being united to Jesus.

Simple. I think this is meant to make us feel liberated and free. Free from needing to go and offer a sacrifice, but go away not quite clean.

Free from thinking, I need to do something. What we need to do is simply be united to Jesus in a living and organic relationship as a branch is united to the vine.

I think that is freeing. So I ask you, do you know that relationship in your own life? Is your faith a relationship with Jesus Christ?

A living relationship with him who is the source of everlasting life? Because that is what he is offering. That is the freedom Jesus brings us.

[7 : 32] So his identity has a lot to do with what it really means to be Christian. Having said that, he wants to have a relationship with us. I want to just look now at what that looks like because Jesus defines that for us, especially with this word abiding.

Look at verse 4 there. The relationship he wants. He says, abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

Now, as we start here, I want to make it quite clear that this is now not something you have to do.

It's funny when we, as Christians, our minds automatically go, okay, what do I have to do?

I have to read the Bible more or pray more or go to church more. Of course, all those things are very important and they are the outflow of your relationship with Jesus. But actually, what he's asking you to do is abide, to rest.

The word really means to abide, to stay, to lodge, to rest, to persevere, to indwell, to be in a close, settled union.

[8 : 39] See, that's not something he's asking us to do. It's a relationship. It's what he offers us. He drives this home to us. There's ten references to abide in this chapter.

He says, abide in me, verse 4, and I in you. Verse 4, the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine. Neither can you unless you abide in me.

Verse 5, he who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit. If a man does not abide in me, he says.

Verse 6, verse 7, if you abide in me and my words abide in you.

Verse 9, abide in my love. Verse 10, just as I keep God's commands and abide in his love. It's not something we do.

It's a resting, really. It's an abandonment. You know, when you became a Christian, you abandoned your life to Jesus. And what he's really saying is stay there. Stay in that place of abandonment.

[9 : 38] Stay in that place of rest. Because that is where there is life. That is where there is abundance. And look at the language. It's relational here.

It runs through the whole passage. It's a two-way street. There is a relating back and forth. We remain in Jesus. And he remains in us. We love Jesus.

And he loves us. We have a relationship with him. And he has a relationship with us. You have a relationship with Jesus. And he has a relationship with you. And it's a relationship that is marked by love.

And the outlaw of that love is obedience. And look at verse 9. He says, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

He says, abide in me. Abide in my words. Abide in my love. I mean, is that not a startling and wonderful and glorious picture of what it means to be Jesus?

[10 : 40] We rest in him. We remain in his love. This is not a striving. This is not a being morally perfect. It's a resting in a relationship of love.

The love of God for his Son is the same love that Jesus has for his people. The quality of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son is the quality of the relationship Jesus has with his people.

And that we are to have with him. And the outflow of that love is obedience to his word. Not the obedience of a slave.

Not obedience to a tyrant. But obedience that comes out of love. It's a glorious thing that he's offering us.

Are you resting in that love? Are you remaining in that love? See, the work is all done by Jesus. He invites us to be united to him.

[11 : 39] To cling to him. To love him. That's what it means to remain. We love him. But there's also content to this relationship.

It has boundaries. It has definitions. And they are established by Jesus. That's why he says in verse 7, If you abide in me and my words abide in you. Verse 10, If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my life.

See, that's the fruit of having a relationship with Jesus. That his words abide in your life. There is content to this abiding established by Jesus. That content is objective.

It does not alter from year to year and age to age. And abiding in Jesus means that his words dwell in you. His word needs to take residence in your life.

And in a world of uncertainties, Jesus refreshingly offers us certainties in his word. Does the word dwell up in your life? Are you full of Jesus' word?

[12 : 41] You can be a real sign in your life, actually, as you go through the word. You find yourself reacting to it. You find yourself rejecting it. Or reacting to it in a way. You say, no, I can't do that.

It might be as you go along, you find the word strikes a chord in your heart, and you respond. You pull back. See, those are places where he needs to work in your life. Because there is an authority, there is a body of teaching which Jesus has left us, around which we orient our lives and the life of the church.

We are people who abide. We rest in him. It's not something we do. It's everything that he has done.

And that's the relationship he wants. Finally, the quality of life he wants. And this is, I'm going to end with, because there is a quality of life that comes from being united to Jesus, that comes from resting in him.

But it is of a different order than you might expect. I heard of a minister who, at a very large church, who preached that Christians should live lives that are healthy, wealthy, and trouble-free.

[13 : 49] Wouldn't that be nice? I have two children, and they've been troubled since the day they were born. And I realize that they're going to continue to be so until the day I die. You see, being a Christian does not necessarily lift us out of real life.

It doesn't lift us out of the here and now. And yet, I venture to say that the quality of life that Jesus wants for us is meant to lead to an abundance and to a fulfillment, to a fulfillment of potential, but not in the way we might have imagined.

And it comes not from what we're doing. It comes from clinging to Jesus, from holding on to him and loving him. Because look at the passage. Jesus talks about fruit, about pruning, and about cutting off.

Picking up in the vineyard metaphor in verse 2, he says, Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, that it might bear more fruit.

What a startling image, actually. I always thought it was bad people who got pruned. But actually, it's those who are fruitful that are going to be pruned. See, there's a warning there and a promise. The warning is that a branch who does not bear fruit will be cut off and thrown into the fire.

[15:05] It's actually quite a striking image about judgment and hell. It's a warning. It's a warning. Well, keeping attached to the vine. But he also promises that the branch that does bear fruit, God prunes.

So either way in your life, you need to expect that the pruning shears are going to be used. And so if you are growing as a Christian, you will need to expect regular pruning sessions.

As I said, I always thought it was bad people who got pruned, and we didn't, actually. But, you know, if you are bearing fruit as a Christian, you ought to expect more pruning so that through you God might produce more fruit.

And the thrust of what Jesus is saying is that he wants to produce fruit through you. See, you're the branch. You're not the fruit. Jesus produces the fruit. And he wants to do that.

He wants to do that. He wants us to be spiritually fruitful. And so remaining in the vine, remaining in him, abiding in Jesus, means above all just remaining, loving him, being united to Jesus, clinging to him, obeying his word.

[16:16] And if you are changing and growing spiritually, you will find sin being challenged in your life. You will find your heart changing so that you become more obedient to Christ and his word.

And that is going to seriously and wonderfully impact upon your life, your conduct, and your character. After all, Jesus commands his disciples to love.

But that is what Jesus wants from his disciples. He wants to produce fruit through you. And that is his work. That is what he does. This is what God will do in us.

And my experience as a Christian has been that sometimes when God does prune, that can be very painful. There can be a, there's a loving ruthlessness about the way God exposes sin so that we might repent and grow more.

You may be going through a season of that right now in your life. Feeling far away from God, feeling chastened, criticized even, never pleasant when sin is exposed in your life.

[17:21] It hurts. But this should be an encouragement to us. It means that you are fruitful. It means that God wants to show more fruit in your life. I was at a Christian conference a couple of years ago put on by a large Christian organization.

And I went to the book stall and looked at all the tapes and programs. Funny, the whole time I was there, these very charming people came up behind me as I picked up a book and they would say, oh, that book really blessed me.

And I'd pick up a cassette. They'd go, that program really changed my life. And I was quite charmed by this until I realized they were all sellers. Nearly spent \$500, so I figured that out.

But, you know, there were books and tapes to help you find your spiritual style, to discern your spiritual gifts, to grow spiritually, and find your purpose. And as they go, I don't think there's anything intrinsically wrong about that, especially as they are faithful to the Word.

But, I wonder. I wonder if I actually think that I'm going to do my own spiritual growing. And I'm going to prune myself. And I'm going to do it the easy way.

[18:24] I think that I see spiritual growth as something I affect, and I produce. And I want to do it in my life the eternally optimistic way, the positive way.

I want to be built up. I want to be encouraged. I want to encourage others, and I would like to be encouraged, please. But actually, I wonder if I'm really afraid of growing the hard way, which is the way of God's pruning me.

I wonder if I want God to produce fruit in me, whatever the cost, whatever the pain, whatever the denial. And I ask you, when does spiritual growth start happening in your life?

Are you seeing fruit in your life? Are you waiting for your next book to come in to region bookstore or Amazon? There's nothing wrong with reading good books. They can be incredibly encouraging.

But you see, ultimately, spiritual growth and fruitfulness is not something we do. It's what Jesus produces. It is the result of being attached to the vine, of loving Jesus.

[19 : 35] And being pruned is a sign that you are fruitful. I've known pruning times in my own life usually happens sometimes when God works through someone else speaking the truth into my life, which can be very painful.

It happens when His Word just gets right to the heart of sin in my life or challenges an area of sin in me. And it hurts. It hurts to see the truth.

It hurts years on in my Christian life to see that sin still has the upper hand. It hurts to go through a season of being pruned.

But friends, it is good. It is an encouragement because it means that God is working in your life. It means that you are attached to the vine. Stay attached to Jesus.

That is the quality of life Jesus wants, that He should produce fruit in you. It is the identity of Jesus. He is the source of life.

[20 : 35] The relationship He wants is that you should abide in Him, rest in Him. The quality of life, He wants to produce fruit. So I end with the words of Jesus, which really is the purpose of it all.

He says, These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. So may it be in all of our lives.

Amen. Amen.