

Keynote: Abiding and Fruit

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[0 : 00] Big, dense chapter. We're just going to get straight into it. So John 15. Right. So Jesus, in our passage, he's speaking to his friends. He's talking to his disciples.

This is part of something called the farewell discourse, or the upper room discourse. So it runs from chapters 13 to 17. And basically, it's Christ has finished his public ministry, and it's Jesus and his people. They're camped out in the upper room, which is basically just the top floor of someone's house.

And Jesus is going to go to the cross in a few days. And so he's teaching his disciples. He's just downloading, downloading, downloading, downloading. Gold, absolute gold on them. And he's preparing them for when he's physically gone from them, because Jesus will die, and he will rise again, and he will ascend.

So he's going to be gone, but present in them with the Holy Spirit. So he's preparing them for that reality. So there's four or five chapters of Jesus just teaching, teaching, teaching his disciples. And what does preparation look like? Well, Jesus talks about a lot of stuff. But if you read all of these chapters in one go, you'd pick up on some significant sort of themes.

[1 : 15] One of the big themes running through them is the relationship between the Father and the Son. Now, in chapter 16, that's next week, the Holy Spirit is brought into the equation with a lot more detail.

We'll wait for that. So what you've got here is the sort of the big story is Jesus is revealing the inner workings of the Trinity and how being a Christian, we're invited into the life of the Trinity.

I'll give you a few examples from our passage. Verse 10, abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. Verse 15, for all I have heard from my Father, I've made known to you.

18, if the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. So do you see what Jesus is doing here? He shows us something of the Trinity, and he shows that Christians were drawn into that.

I'll explain a little bit further. So this is really great and really difficult. So it's really great. For example, verse 15 there, it says that the Father's talking to Jesus, and then Jesus tells us what the Father has said.

[2 : 27] That's brilliant. That's us being pulled into the Trinity, invited into the life of the Trinity there. Really great, really difficult. Verse 18, the world hates you. So the rejection that God experienced at the hands of people, I mean, we put them on a cross, right?

You can't get more rejected than that, right? So the rejection that God experienced, we are brought into that as well, by being rejected ourselves, or thought foolish, or stupid, or intolerant.

Right, that's a preamble. Preamble. Now into the text. So we've said that the big theme running through these chapters here is this farewell discourse. It's the Trinity.

It's about the Trinity and us being drawn into it. So how does chapter 15 add to that theme? How does it expand on that theme? Well, Jesus says participating in the life of God is about two things. One, abiding, and two, mission. So it's about abiding, and it's about mission. And I'll explain that a little bit more.

[3 : 34] So abiding in Christ. That's the first task of Christians. In fact, it's what it means to be a Christian. It means being fastened to Jesus like a branch to a tree.

And the result of this, the result of this abiding is mission. But a mission in two directions. A mission in which we are sent to each other.

In here. And mission we are sent out to the world. So abiding and then mission to each other and to the world.

And that is the outline of the sermon, basically. Abiding in Christ, verses 1 to 11. The mission to one another, verses 12 to 17. The mission to the world, 18 to 26.

Here we go. Those are the sections. First of all, we're going to talk about abiding. The passage, you heard it a lot, right? It uses the word, like I think about 11 times I counted.

[4 : 35] Repeatedly, Jesus says, abide in me, abide in me. So what does abide actually mean? Well, it sounds like kind of a fancy old-timey word. Like eventide, for example.

We sang about eventide, right? In the song, eventide. It's not. It's actually a very ordinary word. It's a very simple word. It just means remain. Or stay. Or lodge. Or dwell.

Or rest. So to prepare the disciples for what's coming, he says to them, abide in me. Stay in me. Dwell in me.

And he says, and I will dwell in you. There's this mutual sort of indwelling here between the believer and Jesus. Quite hard to get your head around. So to try and help them understand it, he gives them a picture.

A picture of a vineyard. And in the first few verses, he says this. He goes, I am the true vine, and you guys are the branches. So it's quite a rich picture. It means to be a Christian.

[5 : 33] To abide in Christ. What does that mean? It means to have a living connection to Jesus. But it's not just a pretty picture. It's not like this kind of romantic picture of like a vineyard, and the sun's going down.

Which is what eventide means, by the way. FYI. Sort of pretty, and it's leafy, and it's green, and it's kind of flourishing. It's not just that. There's actually, as we read through the passage, there's a little bit of a bite to this picture.

There's a bit of an edge to the picture. I used to have these friends that played in this Christian band back when I was at university. And they got invited to speak, no, to sing, to play at the quad at Auckland University.

Which is, is there a quad at UBC? Like where everyone gathers? Like a central area. Imagine if there was a central area at UBC where the students gather, right? So they got invited to speak, and you're thinking they're just going to get destroyed.

A Christian band at this very sort of secular liberal university. Well, what made it kind of work was they were like a hardcore band. So they were like, I don't know if you know these bands, but Fugazi or Earth Crisis or Jawbreaker.

[6 : 44] No, it means nothing. It's all right. So there's kind of this hardcore band. And I was thinking about this when I was writing this, because they used to sing this song, I am the vine, you are the branches.

They'd sing scripture. So they'd sing this song, I am the vine, you are the branches. But it all started mellow. And then they get into the chorus, which was, Jesus Christ will not be mocked. So they're just screaming, Jesus Christ will not be mocked.

And it was like, it was really cool. Because I went to the gig to support them, thinking they're just going to get annihilated. But they were, it was a kingdom moment, man. It was a kingdom moment. There was like, you could have heard a pin drop if not for the tinnitus, the bleeding of the ears. I'm the vine, you are the branches.

There's a bite. There's an edge to this picture here. So Jesus says it's not just any vine. It's like, I'm a really great vine.

[7 : 44] Have a go. Try a few vines, but I'm a great one. No, he doesn't say that. He says, I'm the true vine. So that means, it means if you want to connect with God, you can only do it through Jesus.

There's one true vine. There is one source of life. You want to know truth. It only comes through the Jesus vine. And of course, any claim of truth like that will meet resistance in a society like we live in. And we'll come back to that idea. The other bite in the passage is that it's not just there's a vine and there's a branch. There's a third character in the picture here.

There's a vine dresser. There's a farmer. The farmer's God. And the farmer's goal for you as a branch is to bear fruit. You see that, right?

Verse 2 and verse 8. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it might bear more fruit.

[8 : 49] In verse 8. This is my, by this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. So you take just those two verses there. What is it saying? It says three things.

One, fruit is the proof of abiding in Jesus. Are you abiding in Jesus? How do you know? It's fruit. Two, God prunes the fruitful branches to be more fruitful.

And three, God cuts away the dead branches. We'll talk about these quickly because this is an important part of the picture that Jesus is giving his disciples. Okay, one. Fruit is proof of abiding in Jesus.

There is no true Christian without fruit. That's because if we're abiding in Jesus, we are empowered to live the life that he's calling us. And what's the fruit? It's Christlikeness. It's Christlikeness. It's being more like Christ. And the passage gives us a couple of specific examples to sort of hang that on. Okay. It talks about obedience. It's a good one. It talks about joy. That's a good one.

[9 : 46] And it also talks about prayer and effective prayer life. And that one is a bit confusing. So I think we'll just spend a minute on that one. Because it uses the example twice.

Look at verse 7 and 16 there. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. Verse 16. Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

That sounds great. But it's not. It doesn't sound right, though, does it? Because that doesn't work, does it? Does that work? I mean, it's not saying if you just believe enough, you can get whatever you want.

You get a Ferrari or like a cool watch or something. It's not saying that. It's not saying that. It's saying this. When we abide in Christ, this is all in the context of abiding.

If we abide in Christ, the words of Christ will form us. They will change us. That makes sense, right? They'll change everything. They'll change everything about us, including how we pray.

[10 : 46] It changes how we pray. So our prayers will not be thoughtless, selfish prayers, trivial prayers. We'll be praying. We'll pray along God's will.

Our prayers will conform to what God is doing because we're sharing the life of God. So thoughtful Christ-like prayers are the fruit of abiding in Christ.

Okay, that's one. That's one. Two. The second thing about this vineyard picture that we learn, particularly about this extra figure here, the third player, God, is that God prunes the fruitful branches to produce more fruit.

What's that mean? Every branch, you, that is doing its job producing fruit gets the knife.

That's basically what it's saying. I mean, it's quite drastic, isn't it? And it can look counterintuitive. Good pruners will cut away parts of branches that look good, that actually have fruit on them, perhaps.

[11 : 54] And that can seem wasteful and harsh, but the tree produces more as a result of that. Now, for our life, for real life on the ground here in Vancouver, pruning can, well, as an example, sometimes the pruning can look like suffering.

It can look like hardship. Not always. It can look like just coming under the authority of God's word, but sometimes it looks like suffering. And you know this, that there are a lot of very fruitful aspects in your life that would not be there without hardship or suffering.

Lastly, we're still talking about the vineyard picture here. The farmer doesn't just prune branches, he cuts them away entirely sometimes. You see that, right?

Like, he's not getting around that. So God prunes fruitful branches and cuts away completely fruitless branches. So God cultivates the living and he cuts away the lifeless.

Jesus, the example of this, the great example of this, is Judas, isn't it? He's the clearest example. He was attached to Jesus for three years, but not feeding on him.

[13 : 08] Judas was a dead branch. He was never a true believer. So this work that the Father does, the vine dresser does, our heavenly Father does, Jesus wants his disciples to know about this.

Remember, he's preparing them for what's coming, his crucifixion, for one. Also, the defection of Judas. The persecution that's coming. So he tells them the work of the Father on the vine so that they will know that God's got it all under control.

And there are purposes in these things. And it's going to be okay. Okay, let's move on. So we've been talking about abiding in Christ and letting his words lodge in your hearts so that obedience and effective prayer and joy, these are things that come naturally to you, product of a living connection with Christ.

Now, a reminder of what I said at the start. As a result of this abiding we just talked about, we're sent on mission. And that mission is in two directions. It's a mission to each other and it's a mission to the world.

So let's spend a few minutes on each of these. Our mission to one another. Verse 12. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

[14:25] So God sends us out to love one another like he loves us. The order is important here. We experience God's love and then we love one another.

Now at 10,000 feet, let's talk about 10,000 feet here. The love of God that we experience, first of all, we experience because God is three persons in one.

So when we say God is love, we're not just making like a nice, it's not like a banner, like a pin or like a poster.

It's not like a fluffy kind of idea. It's meant to be just this nice kind of thing that we say about God.

God is love. No, God is actually intrinsically and inherently love. Because God couldn't be love if he was one person.

God is not one person. God is this vibrant, active, living union of three persons in one. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Who love each other in the Trinity.

[15:36] And the love that we experience from God, that's just us participating in a love that has eternally existed. We're just buying into this love that's eternally been there.

That's unimaginably joyful and good. I mean, it's mind-blowing, right? So we're called to love each other with that kind of love.

So what does this kind of love look like? We get the example in verse 13. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. So our model for how we love each other is Christ's death, Christ's sacrificial death.

So the love we have for each other, it's got to be costly love. And when that kind of love exists in a community like this, that's the best missionary artifact that we have.

When we're a loving community, a just community, a community without favoritism, where the rich and the poor and the young and the old and the clever and the less clever are all valued, that is a community that the non-believer will want to be part of.

[16:48] It's a church you'll want to belong to. It's a church that I want us to be. And it's a community that can only exist when the sacrificial and costly love of Christ is present, as we experience it, and as we love each other with that kind of love.

Right, to sum up where we're at so far. When you're grafted into the vine of Jesus, you know his love, and you love others in that way.

And when you do that, you are making the Trinity visible to the world. So, abide in Christ.

Do that, and you'll be sent on mission to one another. And you'll be sent out on mission to the world.

And we'll do this one quickly, and then we'll close up.

Verse 18 and 19, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, and the world would love you as its own, but because you're not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

[18:09] Goodness, it's such, very strong words, isn't it? Very strong words. But I think most of us probably have experienced this to some degree. So why does it say that the world hates Christians sometimes?

Well, Christians do stupid things. But apart from that, apart from Christians doing stupid things, the main reason is, here's the reality of life in a city like Vancouver, in most places in the world, is that we all want to grow our own vines.

We all want to be our own vine. We all want to just graft our own. We all just want to be a branch on our own tree, basically. And so someone comes along and says, no, no, no, no, no. There's a true vine.

You need to be on that one. When you say that, you're making a statement about the world, or you're making a statement about the person you're talking to, and you're making a statement about the emptiness of trying to be your own vine, the emptiness of being your own source of truth and life.

And no one wants to hear that. The gospel is very offensive, inherently offensive, because of the cross.

[19 : 26] Because of the cross. Because of the cross, the cross stands against everyone's scheme of self-salvation. Now, you'd be fine if you said, well, I believe in Jesus, but everyone's to their own.

Everyone can do their own thing. I'm just into Jesus. But you can't put Jesus in a temple filled with all these other gods. It just, it won't work, given what Christ has said about himself. There's only one place to put that guy, and that's on a cross.

Let's get rid of him. So we should not be surprised when people think that we are silly, or intolerant, or ridiculous, or stupid. As we joined, as we abide in the vine, the true vine of Christ, we will experience its power, its love, its comfort, but we will also share in its rejection.

Verse 18 again, one more tiny thing here to mention. If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. I think Jesus is being a little bit pastoral here as well. Like you said, there's really heavy things.

He's preparing them for what's coming, and he goes, listen, I just know the world's going to resist you, but don't take it too personally, because they're not really angry at you. They're actually angry at me.

[20 : 38] How do we deal with this kind of rejection? How do we deal with this life, and still further the gospel? Well, it's by the power of the Holy Spirit, isn't it? And that's why Jesus finishes with these thoughts in verse 26.

But when the helper comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he'll be a witness about me. And you will also be a witness, because you've been with me from the beginning.

It's very interesting. In this passage here, the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is not to give us good feelings, which the Holy Spirit does do sometimes. It's not to make our life easy. The Holy Spirit does do that sometimes.

The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit here is not to tell us which job to take, or which boy or girl to date. The Holy Spirit will do that sometimes. The primary purpose is to help us bear witness to Jesus.

It's to help us confront our world with the true vine. And we are in desperate need of that Holy Spirit in Vancouver. You can be, you can have a great apologetic, you can have great reasons for God, you can have flawless arguments, it will not make a difference without the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 54] Folks, there's a million more things to say about this, and this is Pentecost Sunday. This is the Sunday when we talk about the Holy Spirit. But just come back next week, because next week's chapter is all about the Holy Spirit.

And we'll talk about it, we'll talk about it a lot more. So wait till then. Apologies on this Pentecost Sunday. Let me close. The best thing in the universe is to be united with Christ.

And Jesus describes it as being in Christ. Folks, you can't get closer than in. There's nothing greater than that. And it's wonderful because it's what we're made for.

And how do we know that we're in Christ? We bear fruit. We become more like Him. And the gospel, and the gospel mission becomes our focus. Mission to one another with costly love.

And us being extensions of the vine in the world that rejects God, but who God really loves. This is our call. Amen.